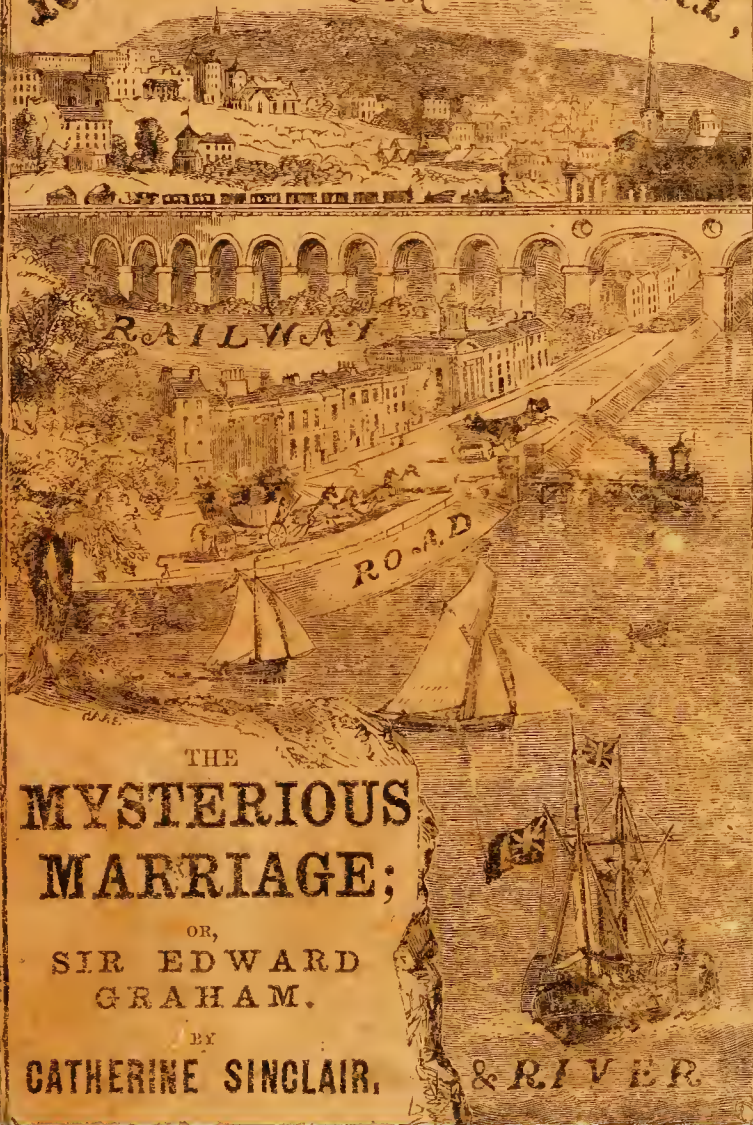


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THE
**MYSTERIOUS
MARRIAGE;**

OR,
SIR EDWARD
GRAHAM.

BY
CATHERINE SINCLAIR.

& RIVER

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 FOR
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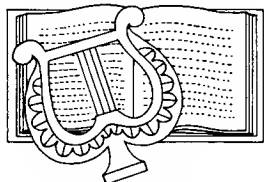
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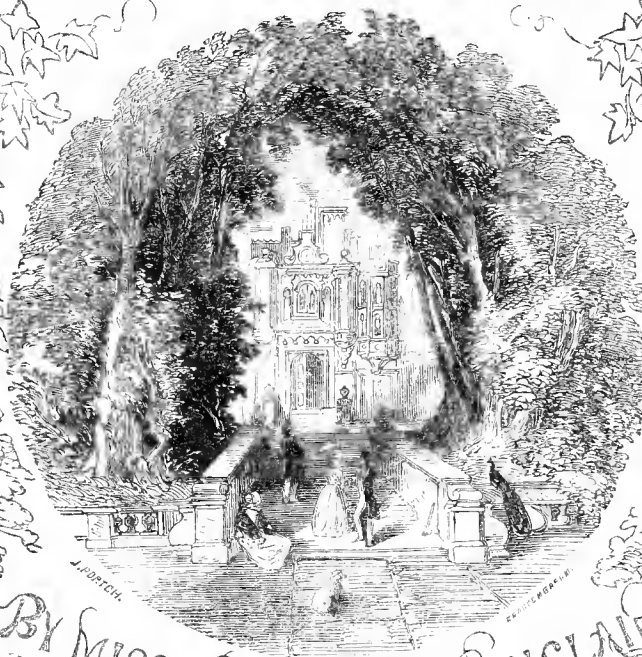
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THE
MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE:

OR,

SIR EDWARD GRAHAM.

BY

CATHERINE SINCLAIR,

AUTHOR OF

'MODERN ACCOMPLISHMENTS;' 'POPIISH LEGENDS;' 'THE BUSINESS OF LIFE;'
'JANE BOUVERIE;' 'BEATRICE;' 'LONDON HOMES,' ETC.

'To think
(At random, and imperfectly indeed)
On man, the heart of man, and human life.'

LONDON:
CLARKE, BEETON, & CO., 148, FLEET STREET.
IPSWICH: J. M. BURTON AND CO.

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PREFACE.

NOVELISTS, like painters, are of many opposite schools. Some, like Mrs. Radcliffe, adopt the Salvator Rosa style, abounding in robber and murder-scenes; while others, like Sir Walter Scott, range themselves under the banner of Vandyke, as historical artists. There are those who attempt sacred groups, like Raphael; or the comic style of Teniers; or, too often, the voluptuous school of Titian and the broad farce of Hogarth. The latter eminent artist often declared that his own favorite works were what he called his 'Conversation Pieces.' These consisted of groups painted in the costume of their day, acting in the genteel comedy of ordinary society; while the characters were all employed in every-day drawing-room occupations — conversing, reading, and acting with their habitual dress, manners,

and customs. Such a style as Hogarth once so successfully aimed at with his pencil, the author desires now to attempt with her pen. Her object, then, however imperfectly she may have executed it, is to give a pleasing, unexaggerated sketch of cheerful manners and amiable motives, of home duties and agreeable occupations; while, to the young and romantic, her desire has been to exemplify how much deeper and better founded than any other happiness is that derived from an honorable, virtuous, and single-hearted attachment, sanctioned by religion, by mutual confidence, and by the approbation of friends as well as of parents.

THE MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

‘Persons, such as Comedy would choose,
When she would show an image of the times,
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.’

JONSON.

THE most juvenile specimens of mankind to be found circulating throughout the world may generally be seen in Edinburgh society, where the beaux in ordinary acceptation at parties usually range, in point of years, between the ages of sixteen and twenty. A young English peer, pursued through every quadrille by the eyes of a vigilant English tutor, is commonly the chief ornament of an Edinburgh ball-room, varied by two or three of the youngest cornets from Piershill, not yet tired of being romantically admired in their uniforms, and a sprinkling of unfledged lawyers still in their years of indiscretion, and not yet endowed with wig or gown, after assuming which, they shall each be considered ‘the most rising young man at the bar,’ and entirely abjure polkas, negus, and flirtation.

There is unfortunately no 'Morning Post' published in Edinburgh, or the name of Lord Leamington might have been stereotyped at the head of every ball or dinner-party, during the season of 1854, and next in order of precedence, an equally juvenile *débutant*, whose general popularity made him known in every house as Harry Graham. His father, Sir Edward Graham, Bart., G.C.B., had been one of the most distinguished heroes of Waterloo, and was now a widower, who lived, with his son and daughter, chiefly at the town residence of his own aged and venerable mother, Lady Harriet Graham.

Harry was in that awkward year of his existence when, having finally left his private tutor's in Surrey, he had not yet entered at Christ Church, and as the disturbed state of Europe forbade the usual resource of sending him to fill up the interregnum at a German university, he now, nominally, attended the classes at Edinburgh College, and really studied *belles-lettres* at the dinner tables there, and moral philosophy in the assembly rooms. He maintained that the square of a circle could be best demonstrated in a quadrille; and the theory of attraction was never so clear to his understanding as when he saw his beautiful sister Laura make her first appearance in society, on the evening our story begins, surrounded by the admiration of all who looked upon her, while, with smiling timidity, she leaned on the only remaining arm of her tall, handsome, distinguished-looking father.

It was a ball in honor of the Queen's birth-day, and Sir Edward wished that on this occasion his lovely young daughter, now, as Harry said, 'on the stroke

of eighteen,' should be allowed to make her *début*, to which Lady Harriet at once acceded. If there was a degree of pride in Sir Edward's step as he appeared in the ball-room, those who imagined it owing to the consciousness of his own celebrity and very striking aspect, covered, as his uniform was, with the stars and ribbons of various countries in which he had distinguished himself, would have been mistaken, for his whole heart and thoughts were filled with indulgent parental pleasure, as he watched the sparkling vivacity and graceful ease with which Harry and Laura entered into the humors of a scene so new to both. The whispers of praise and admiration which were murmured around, fell pleasingly now on Sir Edward's willing ear. When Laura was led away to go through the solemnity of her first quadrille, with her old school-room companion, Captain Peter Grey, recently paid off from the *Termagant*, Miss Perceval, an elderly young lady, who seemed to have appointed herself praiser-general of all mankind, advanced, wearing her own perpetual smile, and, taking Laura's place, pretended to follow her admiringly for some moments with her eyes, and then suddenly broke out with a well assumed tone of impromptu enthusiasm, exclaiming, 'Sir Edward, you certainly have in your children all that a father need desire; beauty for the daughter, and talent for the son! My old favorite, Laura, is the *Prima Donna* of the evening, and seems really to be the favorite child of nature, so abounding in every gift to adorn her. She is internally and externally the most perfect being in the universe, and I am really proud of belonging to the same sex.'

'That is a compliment at our expense, Miss Perceval,' said Harry, laughingly glancing at Sir Edward: 'I shall move off directly, if you promise to say something as civil of me. Do launch out a little, for Sir Edward really is not half sufficiently proud of his remarkably promising son!'

'Then get you gone, Harry,' replied Miss Perceval, tapping him slyly on the arm with her fan. 'Leave yourself in my hands. I know people better than they know themselves, and shall do you ample justice.'

'Are you fit to be trusted? However, the most ingenious enemy could say nothing but good of me; therefore, lay it on liberally, and I shall be off. The danger, Miss Perceval, is trusting my father in your hands!'

As Harry led off his usual partner, Miss Grey, he looked archly at Sir Edward's self-constituted companion, and was astonished to observe a crimson glow mount to Miss Perceval's cheeks and throat, when he said these few careless words about Sir Edward. 'I had no idea,' thought he, wonderingly, as he pursued his laughing and dancing career through the room, light as any feather blown along the floor, 'not a conception that elderly young ladies of above thirty were addicted to blushing. What did I say? There, she has seized hold of my father's arm, and would perhaps accept his hand if he had the misfortune to offer it. How ridiculous many old ladies are! And now, Miss Grey, I must let you into the true secret of Miss Perceval's favoritism with my father. She has but one arrow in her quiver. Hers is, as you know, the very

smallest of small talk ; but my father will be treated for one good hour at least to interjections, exclamations, and apostrophes, eulogies and panegyrics in honor of Laura and me, with a few sly insinuations, how much, in all that is best, we resemble him.'

During the rest of that evening, Harry was secretly diverted every now and then as he observed Miss Perceval still perseveringly clinging to Sir Edward's arm, with a sort of convulsive grasp, like that of a person who would be drowned if she let go ; and he knew, as well as if he had heard her speaking, that she had taken hold of Sir Edward's only weak side, as well as of his only arm, while praising his children to extravagance, varied by an occasional digression to commemorate Lady Harriet's incomparable virtues, and his brother Major Graham's noble and distinguished character.

'I know it all !' said Harry, as he led Charlotte Grey, the prettiest girl in the room, except his sister, to a place in the quadrille opposite to Laura and Captain Grey, while he amused his partner with an imaginary imitation of all Miss Perceval was probably saying. 'Nothing puts uncle David in such a rage as when she presumes to praise him. "What right has she to know any thing about me?" he says, "I wish we could bury each other in mutual oblivion ; but that would be too honorable a funeral for the faults and follies of Emily Perceval !"'

'There is some very odd story,' observed Captain Grey to Harry, in an under-tone. 'I remember, last year, she was half cut by every body, and, though her most intimate friends looked coldly at her, she never

ventured to ask why they had made so marked a change. She grew very red in the face, and talked incessantly, when my mother, as being a relation, thought it necessary to call; but what it all was I never understood, except that her strange disreputable scape-grace of a cousin, Sir Fitzroy, seemed very much blamed. Whenever any thing goes wrong in our family, or in any other person's, the culprit in fault is either "Nobody," or Sir Fitzroy Perceval, Bart. of the Queen's Bench, and Holyrood Sanctuary.'

Miss Perceval had not smiled her last smile, nor exhausted her powers of panegyric, when the music ceased, the directresses dispersed, the carriages stopped the way, and the ball was over. By a skilful manœuvre, she then secured a place in Sir Edward's chariot, and, with a million of apologies for taking his horses 'a little out of their way,' got herself set down in the steep remote little side street where her solitary domicile was situated; and with over-done gratitude expressed her endless thanks for this kindness, and regrets at parting. 'But,' added she sentimentally, '*On peut fuir sans oublier*.'

Sir Edward then made some remarks on Miss Perceval being very good-hearted, and the pleasure of seeing an old friend looking so very well. He delighted to meet with those who still remembered former days, and who still could speak of those especially whom he had long lost and long lamented; but Sir Edward's observations were drowned in the torrent of ball-room reminiscences, poured into his ear by Harry and Laura, who thought Miss Perceval's sympathy and remembrance could be of little interest to Sir Edward,

compared with hearing the last anecdote of Lord Leamington, or the last nonsense spoken by Peter Grey, or some of the young Captain's most spirited exploits as related by his sister Charlotte. 'Do you know, papa,' said Laura, her eyes glittering with laughter, 'at one of the principal theatres in Spain, Peter scrambled up from the pit to the shilling gallery, as if he had been ascending the main-mast of the Termagant, to punish some Spanish sailors for insulting an old woman. The whole audience stood up to watch his progress and to applaud him, when he arrived, as safely as any cat could have done, at this high preëminence.'

'He is a fine dashing fellow,' said Sir Edward, rather absently: 'I have no doubt Peter Grey will be either knocked on the head or knighted before he has served much longer. It is a great pity the Termagant was paid off.'

CHAPTER II.

' Ah ! the times were merry times,
When you and I were young.'

BARRY CORNWALL.

WHILE Lord Leamington outdid all his contemporaries by the splendor, both of his studs and of his stud, only one individual young lady appeared indifferent to the fascination of his dress, appearance, rank, and manners. To his own great surprise, Miss Graham seemed no more flattered by his marked attentions than by those of any other nameless partner, as she merely reckoned the felicity of her first ball by the number of times she had danced, and especially, if the truth were told, with her most amusing partner, Captain Grey. It appeared to ordinary spectators affectation, but to the young and frolicsome like himself quite allowable, that Peter Grey, a month after he had been on shore, still preserved a nautical manner and appearance, to which by profession he had so long been accustomed. The stray ringlet of hair on his forehead, as if blown there by a gale of wind, the black ribbon tied round his throat to represent a neckcloth, and the round jacket which he usually wore every morning, showed off to advantage a figure so light, well-built, and active, that it seemed as

if to him nothing could be an exertion; while these all combined with his somewhat weather-beaten complexion to indicate a son of Neptune. With as frank and honest a heart as ever beat, he had a laughing, good-humored, sailor-like manner, as well as a ready word for every one; and he sung admirably, giving due expression to 'Tom Bowling,' or to 'The Dangers of the Shore.' He had a good story for every occasion; sometimes *bien trouvé* certainly, but always amusing; and his wit had the rare merit of never being severe on any individual except one. That only unlucky exception was his cousin, Emily Perceval, Peter's dislike of whom Harry often compared to the unaccountable antipathy of some people for cats, as it seemed scarcely to have a sufficient assignable ground, and, when remarked, only caused him to sing those well-known words:

'I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.'

Next morning, after the assembly, Harry Graham breakfasted with Captain Grey, and, as all sailors are epicures, the table was then most profusely covered. The unprecedented demolition of ham, shrimps, muffins, beef-stakes, rolls, preserves, and toast, did not, however, impede conversation, and, as Captain Grey broke into his third egg, he despondingly observed, 'I really wish fortune were not quite so blind! If she would only make haste to unbandage her eyes and look favorably on me, it is no more than I deserve; but the fact is, Harry Graham, that the whole world has a special spite

against me, particularly the First Lord of the Admiralty, or why does he not promote me, and give me a good ship on a good station? I never bore people with my own praises, but if you wish to behold unappreciated merit, look at me!’

‘The world knows nothing of its greatest men!’ replied Harry, glancing at Captain Grey, with a laugh. ‘Well, Peter! we are both very well in our way; but what then?’

‘There are ill-used men in the world as well as myself, I allow,’ continued Captain Grey, throwing his leg dejectedly over the arm of a chair, and settling himself into an attitude of graceful despondency. ‘Every officer in the service considers that he deserves better of his country. But I have my grievances and am determined to make the most of them. I had been building up my castles in the air with the very best cards in the pack, but now all is over. Are you prepared this morning, as my friend, Harry, to go hand in hand with me into the very depths of despair?’

‘Give me another slice of that ham, then, while I prepare. You do look like the centre of gravity to-day, Peter, and no mistake. Your appetite quite gone, after only eating what might have breakfasted three grouse-shooters. It is very alarming. Believe me, I have the most dismal opinion of your case, and now——what is the matter?’

‘The matter is fifty thousand torments, and, if that be not enough, add as many more. The worthy admiral, my father, sends a letter by to-day’s post, to intimate that, as the sadly mistaken Admiralty do

not immediately require my valuable services, he recommends me, in the meanwhile, for a few months to try my native air at Rockingham. O, Harry! how I should like this winter to be an omnibus horse!’

‘Very pleasant I dare say, Peter, but why?’

‘Because, in that case, I should never be off the stones, and could remain always in town. My genius is not at all in the line of rural felicity, especially in winter,’ said the young Captain, in a tone of good-humored fretfulness. ‘Fancy any man being expected of all places in the world to go home! a nook associated in my recollection with living on boiled mutton and turnips; threading my mother’s needle; being expected to ring the bell, or to reach a chair, every five minutes for my sisters; and always hearing everybody say to everybody, “Never mind! it is only Peter!” Certainly, Harry, for taking down one’s dignity and self-importance, “there’s no place like home!”’

Captain Grey musingly hummed, in an under-tone, some bars of that favorite air, making several comic alterations, very little suited to the pathetic vein of the music, and then continued: ‘We ought to have a railway round the world, like those roundabouts at a fair! I should be very happy then to attend every levee at the Admiralty, and to patronise my relations occasionally; but they are most unreasonable people to be again clamoring for me now. I have scarcely yet had time to make above half-a-dozen young ladies fall desperately and hopelessly in love with me, like so many Desdemonas, for the dangers I have

passed. Harry! "travellers ne'er did lie, though fools at home condemn them," and you should hear how I can out-Sinbad the old sailor himself!'

'I dare say you do, Peter, and probably eclipse Baron Munchausen besides, though perhaps your delighted audience may feel inclined sometimes to say, as the mathematician did of Johnson's Dictionary: "This is all assertion, while nothing is proved." The hero of Navarino is not, however, quite entirely fabulous in what he relates, and the only affectation about you, Peter, is your pretending to care for nothing or nobody, when the undeniable fact is that you have preferred the interest of every one to your own, and have more heart than any six ordinary men. A heart, Peter, as warm as midsummer, and that we all know how to value.'

Captain Grey grasped Harry by the hand for an instant with momentary emotion, and the color mounted into his frank honest countenance; but, ashamed to betray any such sensibility, he continued in his usual rattling tone: 'My heart, such as it is, Harry, has been irretrievably lost ages ago; but that is a secret never to be divulged—not even to the young lady herself. I hate myself for my own presumption, and I utterly abhor that rather tolerable-looking Lord Leamington.' The young Captain gave a hasty glance into the opposite mirror at his own good-looking weather-beaten face, and readjusted the stray curl on his forehead, saying, 'I really believe myself to be the handsomest ugly man in existence!'

'A nice distinction, Peter. You are grown so long and thin that, really, when dancing last night with

Laura, you looked like a pair of insane tongs. You have grown as tall as the main-mast itself.'

'Yes: I sometimes do duty for it on stormy nights. Now, Harry, I am not the sort of match that rigid fathers and ambitious brothers might select, and I scarcely dare tell the secret of my own attachment to my own heart. I intend to shoot Lord Leamington before the next assembly; but still there is not the frailest twig for my insignificant self to hang a hope upon!'

'Suppose you try the ladder-of-ropes line, Peter, a yellow post-chaise, a rapid flight, a hot pursuit, an indignant father, a disinheritance, and then, of course, a pathetic reconciliation! If you require an extempore papa on the occasion, you may command my services at a minute's notice!'

'Thank you, Harry; but if I ever venture, like an Irishman, to stand prostrate at the young lady's feet, perhaps the part my best of friends would have to act is not precisely what you seem to expect,' said Peter, turning hastily away, and gazing out of the window, with a very evident accession of color on his cheek. 'How hot this room has become! The indispensable rule is, you know, "after breakfast walk a mile!"'

These words had been scarcely uttered before the two young men were linked arm in arm, and proceeding along Prince's Street, while they nearly wore out their hats in bowing to the number of intimate acquaintances who streamed past, and Harry, on one occasion, distinctly felt the arm of his friend give a convulsive start, but on looking round he could see nothing whatever to account for it—only his grandmother, Lady Harriet, in her chariot, dowagering

along the road with Laura, in the full glow of radiant beauty, looking the personification of spring beside winter, as, with a bright smile of girlish cordiality, she kissed her hand to each of the gentlemen. Captain Grey now hurried on with greatly accelerated speed, until Harry, almost breathless with keeping up to his companion's six-mile-an-hour pace, found himself whirling round that splendid new drive on Arthur's Seat, 'The Queen's Road.' Transported thus in a moment from the scenery of Prince's Street, with its magnificent wreath of shops, its many-colored silks and satins, its glittering carriages, its shabby cabs and omnibuses, and its crowd of well-dressed pedestrians, to the wild desolation of the Hunter's Bog, which looks as if untrodden by any human foot, the solitary precipices of Salisbury Crags, and the massy grandeur of the hills around, Harry paused a moment to admire the most beautiful promenade belonging to any metropolis in Europe, or elsewhere, and also to take breath. Peter, who employed himself in vigorously beheading the daisies around him with a favorite walking stick, evidently heard not a word of all his companion's exclamations, till at last Harry added: 'I must bring my grandmother here to see these new improvements. Did you observe her passing us in the old rumbleton of a carriage, drawn by our worthy Dobbins of horses?'

'See her, Harry? to be sure! What have people eyes for? She was looking more lovely than ever! As Wordsworth says:

"The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!"'

‘My grandmother?’ asked Harry, slyly.

‘No: Laura!—I—I mean your sister,’ stammered Peter, successfully beheading the last daisy, and with a very conscious laugh. ‘I have rather a scruple of mind now, Harry, that, since my return from sea, and her *début*, I must absolutely practise calling your sister “Miss Graham.” What right have I to continue so familiar, merely on the score of being a mischievous boy about the house long ago?’

‘And poor Frank’s favorite shipmate,’ added Harry with emotion. ‘Peter, if you become formal and distant, it will break our hearts, or rather I would break your head. How could you dream of such a thing? Am I a person, like the man in the moon, to change every month? We are more than brothers.’

‘I wish we were so in earnest; but, Harry, it would be a cruelty towards myself to make any change from old times,’ said the young Captain, laughing and coloring. ‘I must throw a rose-colored tint over all my future hopes, and you know “The wretch of to-day may be happy to-morrow”’

‘I wish he may!’ said Harry, in a tone of boyish glee. ‘Peter, I like your liberal way of keeping a secret—letting it ooze out, like Bob Acres’s courage, at your finger-ends. Some mill-stones are very easily seen through, but I shall be as silent as a catacomb. After your next great naval victory, depend on my hearty consent.’

‘Thanks! When I get a peerage and a pension you shall be reminded of this promise. Then, perhaps, my Alnaschar-like visions of unearthly felicity may all be realised; but, meantime, I intend to struggle

courageously, pellmell, through life; and in this changeable world—changeable, even you and I have already found it, Harry—we must not be over-anxious about what may happen next year or to-morrow. I have all my life had a presentiment that somebody will unexpectedly leave me £5,000 a-year. In love or war, no man should sit down contented if he has not taken every imaginable means to be fortunate, but then, you know, “it is not in mortals to command success.”

‘No, Peter; certainly not. If it were, you are the man to do so; but how I envy you for the dashing adventurous life which, from the very dawn of existence, yours has been! It made a man of you at once, having looked death in the face at Acre and Navarino, besides saving so many from drowning at the launch last year, and getting gold medals, as well as golden opinions, from all the Humane Societies.’

‘Still, Harry, all men who ever lived complain of their own times, as if the world were unworthy of them at the particular period in which they exist; and I find great fault with the total impossibility, in these peaceful days, of an officer distinguishing himself. One stalk of wheat in a field might as well attempt to raise its head above all the others as any one officer to become conspicuous.

“ Yet glorious hopes, that now to speak
Would bring the blood into my cheek,
Pass’d o’er me when I wrote on high
A name I deem’d should never die.”

Some days now elapsed before the two young men

met again ; but when Harry was one morning at the exhibition of modern pictures, 'airing his eyes,' as Peter observed, by the contemplation of Watson Gordon's *chef-d'œuvre* for the season, which the communicative catalogue had indicated as the 'Portrait of a Lady,' and which Harry was admiring so much that he thought no other painter fit to hold a palette in the room with him—his arm was suddenly locked in that of Peter Grey, who swept him hurriedly off to a remote corner of the exhibition, where he stopped, and, fixing his clear steadfast eye on Harry, with a look of anxiety, he said abruptly,—

'It is my rule, you know, rather to lose a friend than lose an opportunity of serving him ; therefore excuse me, Graham, if I ask an impertinent question. Is there any truth in this horrid and most aggravating report about your father ?'

'How!—what!—my father? You must be dreaming, Grey. I have heard nothing!'

'Ah! that is a comfort. There are people in the world, Harry, who rise early every morning to invent falsehoods for the day, and there are fools like myself who sometimes believe them. I would, an hour since, have parted with my half-pay from June till January to feel as sure as I do now that the whole story is an utter fabrication. People are alleging that Sir Edward, handsome and distinguished as he is, and not much above fifty, intends to marry again.'

'Well, Peter, if he does, we may be certain his choice must be a good one ; therefore, why not? My father certainly has been very long inconsolable.'

'Harry, Major Graham would go deranged as well

as myself if the report were true. Only think what a bride-cleet the ridiculous world has invented for Sir Edward. No less a personage than my utterly-to-be-aborred, rather elderly, and never-to-be-sufficiently avoided cousin, Emily Perceval. I protest, Harry, there she is at this moment trying to look like a blushing rose-bud! And Sir Edward with her!’

It was indeed true. Miss Perceval, splendidly got up, with an invariable smile stereotyped on her countenance, and talking of the pictures with a forty-connoisseur power, was clinging to the arm of Sir Edward, who listened languidly, and seemed endeavoring to be amused, though not very successfully, by a torrent of remarks, all carefully gleaned by his diligent companion from the newspapers of the previous day, and retailed with the impromptu tone of a skilful amateur.

Harry Graham stood aghast with astonishment, while he silently gazed at Sir Edward and his talkative companion, whose every feature seemed to him false as her smiles; but all that blonde lace and pink ribbons could do to create youth and beauty had been done, so that Emily Perceval looked as perfect a piece of fantastic finery as if she had recently served for a frontispiece to the ‘Magazin des Modes.’

‘There she is, really a splendid specimeu of the middle ages! Flattering Sir Edward as usual about you and Laura! Dear, clever, amiable, young creatures!’ continued Captain Grey, mimicking the tone of almost seraphic sweetness in which Miss Perceval usually spoke to the Baronet of his children. ‘She

becomes perfectly hysterical in pronouncing her panegyric on you; but her very praise is an insult, Harry. Only imagine how supremely ridiculous she would make herself as Lady Graham! Think of Emily Perceval saying to some one, in her affected mincing way, "Oh! Sir Edward really is *tip top*!"

'No, no, Peter! impossible—keep to probabilities! The very sight of my father would extinguish any such vulgar epithet. Don't you hate yourself for even repeating it?'

'The only thing in life I ever yet had cause to be ashamed of was being cousin to Emily Perceval,' continued Captain Grey, watching her progress with anxious curiosity. 'She is master of the art of being absurd; but Emily Perceval is very deep, Harry, and neither bashful nor scrupulous. I wish she may not outwit us all yet! If any earthly circumstances could justify an anonymous letter—but nothing can—I would dip my pen in gall and write only the truth to Sir Edward; but I came lately from China, where, by law, every writer of an anonymous letter is put to death, even if the contents prove true. Poor, unsuspecting, Sir Edward! Why cannot Emily keep to her very suitable cousin, Sir Fitzroy? The world would certainly die of laughing if they took each other in, and I am told it was lately a very narrow escape for both. The gossips have something to hear about that affair yet, if I am not very much misinformed.'

Captain Grey was somewhat startled, yet almost amused, when he passed Miss Perceval, to observe her pointing out a mournful picture of a disconsolate-

looking lady in black velvet, with a tear in her eye, representing 'Meditation,' to Sir Edward, while she said, in a tone of almost hysterical sympathy—

'Ah! how touching! She has evidently suffered "all that woman's heart may bear—but must not tell." She has "watched for steps that came not back"—she has loved, and been forgotten. Compared with that sorrow, oh! who would say that death is to be feared!'

Sir Edward looked astonished, and was evidently perplexed what to reply, for to him the picture had appeared little more than the portrait of a black velvet gown.

'Look at Emily Perceval!' said Peter. 'She keeps her eye fixed on Sir Edward as if, by losing sight of him for a moment, she might lose the reality of his presence! I declare, Harry, there ought to be a jury on all absurd wills or ridiculous marriages, to set aside those that are unutterably bad. In general, Emily is surrounded by such a flock of boys, that she seems to keep an Infant School for Flirtation; but that scene before our eyes with Sir Edward would frighten you out of your wits, if you had any wits to be frightened out of. If Emily Perceval gains her point, it would kill dear old Lady Harriet, and break Laura's heart; yet I know she has more than half announced the marriage to a friend already as being settled. It has made me feel quite out of sorts and all-overish ever since.'

'Peter, you were always a perfect whirl-brain, jumping at conclusions. You have had a thirty years' war with Miss Perceval, and, as it rages yet undiminished,

you are frightened at the shadow of a chance—at a total impossibility.’

‘Do not ask me to become bail for that! I know her thoroughly; and oh! how Emily and I hate each other! I long ago found it so laborious to cultivate friends, Harry, that now I cultivate enemies. It is a much easier task, and quite as exciting. To cultivate a warm friend takes years; but you can make a warm enemy in a minute.’

‘Pray do not begin to cultivate me, Peter.’

‘Not yet, Harry! but I purposely offend two or three people every day, which gives me something to think of. It is like a game at chess. I first find an antagonist, and then make an aggressive move; but many a check Emily has had from me, and now she needs another. People who would otherwise be totally insignificant acquire a new interest when we get up a quarrel. It is an event in my daily walk to cut and be cut; and it gives a zest to the stupidest tea party, when I have to look fierce at the gentleman sipping his tea opposite to me. I am happy to assure you that I really do stand preëminent in Emily’s bad graces; and when Peter Grey hates people on sufficient grounds, he takes the most upright and downright plan by letting them know it. If I like people, Harry, they must find it out.’

Captain Grey put his hand on Mr. Graham’s shoulder with a look of earnest kindness, and with an expression of peculiar sensibility unlike his usual gay levity of manner, and, seating himself on a bench with his companion, became suddenly grave and anxious; and, for some moments, fell into a musing attitude, from

which he suddenly roused himself as Miss Perceval and Sir Edward left the exhibition, saying, in a tone of the most unanswerable good sense—

‘The fact is, Harry, that your grandmother and uncle are both rather a degree too good for this world. They cannot see what I always flatly and roundly maintain, that, as even the worst weeds in this world have their uses in the vegetable creation, so the nettles of scandal and gossip have their very essential uses in common society. They keep designing people down in their proper places, and put the unwary on their guard against the undeserving. Now, Lady Harriet from good-humored indifference to my cousin Emily, and Major Graham from utter contempt, very rarely allude to Miss Perceval at all, and never mention any one of the strange, oddish, almost unbelievable stories that I could, would, and should have entertained Sir Edward with, as soon as he returned from abroad.’

‘My father neither knows, nor thinks, ill of anybody.’

‘So much the worse! That is the very thing I complain of! You have all too much of the milk of human kindness—or, rather, the milk and water. There is not ‘a good hater’ in the whole family! I would back Laura against you all on that point. Now, Harry! go home, and make your uncle David bestir himself, if not already too late. He must warn your father whom to distrust; and, if a reference as to character is wanted respecting Emily Perceval, let application be made at my office.’

‘Farewell for the present, as I am impatient to

see uncle David. Remember my grandmother's very primitive dinner hour, Peter, when you are to celebrate Laura's eighteenth birthday with us, to-day.'

'A long engagement, Harry, but, if I'm alive, I'll come.'

'And if you are dead, we shall not expect you.'

Harry was enchanted when first it dawned upon his intellect that there was what he called a demi-semi-flirtation between his sister and Peter, of which he firmly believed himself to be the only discoverer; and a very satisfactory discovery to his own private mind it was. In all Harry's conclusions and thoughts there was a flashing rapidity which skimmed lightly over all impediments; and, certainly, if at College he were not the ninth wonder of the world in classical attainments, he had become a first-class man at whatever required energy and quickness in body or mind. It might have been difficult to say on what account Harry Graham seemed always, by general consent, among his young companions at Eton and elsewhere, the person of most influence. Without a trace of arrogance, without the aid of any extravagance either in dress, equipage, or jewellery, and without any assumption of superior talent, his conversation and manner testified that high tone of feeling which is the very aristocracy of nature. With masters as well as boys his popularity had exceeded belief; yet no one could tell when young Graham studied, as he seemed always in a state of gentleman-like leisure, so that his tasks, though thoroughly prepared, seemed never to have cost him an hour's assiduity. At his private tutor's

in Surrey, he was able to go through the utmost rigors of Greek and Latin, without injuring his health; and now he was in diligent preparation to enter at Christ Church, where Major Graham, soon after Peter's arrival to his early dinner at Lady Harriet's, professed an expectation that Harry would certainly be plucked.

'So much the better!' exclaimed Captain Grey. 'The dead languages should all be buried now! Men who acquire an unnatural craving for the classics become good for nothing but to stare at folios, and fall into ecstasies about heathen gods and heroes. I assure you, Major, the two dullest men I ever met with in society were the Senior Wrangler of his year at Cambridge, and a double-first-class man from Oxford. Positively, they had not an idea between them! They were torches burnt out—they were fires extinguished by too much fuel. They were, I assure you, hopelessly stiffened and crippled by mental restraint. Our friend Harry is the only clever man one really ever could like; but I hope Dr. Halifax will not take the leaven out of his brain with too much cramming! Fancy a mind like Harry's or mine—meant to contemplate the universe, but cramped into a satchel of Latin books!'

'Ah!' said Laura archly, 'that Emperor of Austria who wished to have no learned men in his dominions would certainly have made it his first care to banish you.'

'I find books very troublesome creditors on my time, and full of mistakes,' observed the young Captain. 'For instance, in history, modern writers, with their

‘historic doubts,” prove that everything was in fact the very reverse of what we have been accustomed to believe.’

‘Indeed! then it was the little princes in the Tower who smothered Richard the Third?’ said Laura, demurely. ‘You were always an advocate for the homœopathic system of small doses in education—a bird’s-eye view of literature and the classics. I forget when it was that you were so nearly killed with too much study?’

‘My study has always been to please you, Laura! but as to reading, take my word for this, it really does not pay. There is nothing to show for it afterwards; and as for a library of entertaining knowledge, no such thing is possible. I never would be so selfish as you and Harry, merely reading for my own improvement. My object would be to dazzle and astonish others with all sorts of impossible knowledge, and to become, in short, an abridgment of all that is pleasant in man.’

‘So you are, Peter, quite a pocket-edition of every creature’s best,’ said Harry, sketching his likeness in the blotting-book beside him, and writing these lines underneath:

‘My friend has his follies so lost in a crowd
Of virtues and feelings that folly grows proud.’

‘Very true,’ added Laura, leaning over Harry, with a hand on his shoulder. ‘And put down the two other lines:

“But with talents like these and an excellent heart,
The man has his failings”’——

‘And what failings have I? Even my worst enemy—that means you, Laura—should know what serious apprehensions were entertained for me at thirteen that my head would burst with knowledge; therefore, in case of becoming too clever to live, I shut up my books and opened my eyes to observe for myself.’

‘Then what have you observed, Peter?’ asked Laura, with one of her brightest smiles, shaking back the dark curls which clustered round her animated face. ‘I suppose you would have discovered for yourself that the world is round!’

‘Yes, with half an eye! Men were all blockheads not to see that sooner; and the law of gravity, the instant I fell out of a three-pair-of-stairs-window, would have occurred to me at once, as I went down! As for steam navigation, every kettle that boils on the fire might have taught men that secret. I am quite provoked at the philosophers for discovering everything before I was born. I could disprove all that has ever been proved. I could make a speech better than Burke or Sheridan, if I only took the trouble of rising. I gained the highest prize at school for knowing the geography of the world before the Deluge; and as for poetry, I could, any day, write something better than “Paradise Lost” if your bright eyes will grant me a little inspiration. More than that the deponent sayeth not.’

‘In short,’ added Harry, ‘you have actually found the lever which Archimedes wanted, for turning the world upside down.’

‘I often wish myself a Fairy Bountiful, who could give people all that is wanting to their being perfect;

but, Peter,' said Laura, with a merry elfish laugh, peculiar to herself, 'you would require a very liberal fairy indeed, to make you even tolerable!'

'Then, Laura, you look so very like a fairy now, that nothing is wanted but the wand.'

'Here is mine;' replied Laura, playfully seizing an ivory paper-cutter, and assuming an air of merry mischief. 'Now for granting all your wishes: I summon from the vasty deep a full-grown seventy-four, well-manned, and destined for five years to the Mediterranean, to be commissioned by Sir Peter Grey, R.N. and G.C.B.'

'No, Laura; I have changed my mind of late. Let it be a small cottage-home; a quiet romantic house, covered with a rose-bush, and containing a large billiard-room, library, conservatory, and ball-room, equal to Lord Leamington's in Warwickshire; stabling for a couple of hunters, good shooting, capital salmon-fishing, and a pony-carriage.'

'Well! you very reasonable petitioner,' said Laura, with a smile sparkling in the blue depths of her animated eyes, 'is that the whole catalogue?'

'Why no! if I may be exorbitant, these are all valueless, without the fairy herself to preside over her gifts.'

'Then the wand is broken!' exclaimed Laura, laughing and coloring, with a look of good-humored caprice. 'I never before heard of a fairy playing at billiards, or driving a pony-carriage with her whip *en parasol* on the high road. Peter! what a hideous waistcoat that is! you really look frightful in it!'

'Quite the contrary! This is velvet of my own

importation from Genoa, and so admired that I mean to lend it out upon hire by the night. When a year or two older, the subscription shall be cheaper, and a percentage paid according to its success. This is the very waistcoat,' continued Captain Grey, adjusting it before the mirror, 'in which I caused such a sensation at Portsmouth. You heard, I suppose, that nine young ladies died of disappointment the day I departed?'

'Sailors must have been at a premium then, Peter, or young ladies very easily overcome,' said Harry, laughing. 'What would they have thought if I had appeared? We take our estimate of you, Peter, personally and mentally from your admirer and especial trumpeter, Miss Pereeval. She declares that the Admiral considered your learning anything a mere humbug, and Mrs. Grey lived in such terror of your attempting to be an Admirable Crichton, that she always promised you a prize during the holidays if you came home lowest in the class!'

'Which I never failed to claim! The head boy at school is invariably a blockhead, and I was always afraid to give a sprain to my mind by over-exertion. The more languages people waste their time in learning, the fewer ideas they have to express. Emily Pereeval herself had always two governesses, an English and a foreign one; so the consequence is that, having learned everything, she knows nothing; yet you never knew so valiant a talker. She could take her seat beside any professor of any science, feeling a perfect conviction of being able to enlighten him. I know she once read part of a book on geology, and never rested afterwards till she got Dr. Buckland by the

button for an hour to astonish him. As for Emily's principles or temper, the less we say about these the better, and she has been over-educated into an idiot, or little short of it. She would go in search of a needle to the North Pole, and wonder how, in this round world, people do not drop off on the other side. I once nearly persuaded Emily that, as the world turns round in twenty-four hours, she might ascend in a balloon, and, by keeping it steady for twelve hours, manage to come down on the antipodes, and so find a short cut to Australia.'

'Peter! you always measured everybody by your heart more than by your head,' observed Laura, with a sly admonitory shake of the head. "You and your cousin have a very short memory for each other's merits!'

'Emily has neither a short memory nor a long memory, for she has no memory at all, except for small affronts and petty grievances. The depth and surface of Emily's acquirements might be compared to that lake in Australia which is forty miles square and in no place above six feet deep: yet she always talks of herself as having "so much imagination!"'

'Peter! you should be gagged whenever Miss Perceval comes on the tapis,' said Lady Harriet, with her own serene and placid smile. 'We must all in future consider you a dark deep well, with truth at the bottom; but leave it there sometimes, when the bringing it up would injure others. Your cousin assured me lately that the chief delight of her life is in sensible conversation.'

'Then she is a most self-denying person, for I never

knew Emily indulge herself, or any one else, with it for a moment,' said Peter with an incorrigible laugh. 'My abuse of that odious cousin is the only luxury of life I ever indulge in; and she deserves it all, if you knew her as I do. Her conversation is generally to be let unfurnished, with not so much in it as would give a filip to any one's understanding!'

'Do you insist in general on every young lady adorning her conversation with new discoveries, noble sentiments, political axioms, oracular predictions, scientific facts, and theological definitions?' asked Harry, slyly. 'Give me rather one with a vast deal of nothingness about her, and who talks at sight, like Miss Perceval, upon any given subject, whether it be the root of languages, the mechanism of the heavens, or the last new patent parasol.'

CHAPTER III.

To you a morning good, good sir ! I wish—
You, sir ! I thank ; to you the same wish I.

HEROIC VERSE.

THERE is hardly a more lamentable sight to be seen in nature—or rather in art—than what is called ‘a wonderful woman!’ One who is assured by jocular acquaintances that she looks every year younger, while she has the misfortune to believe them in earnest—who waltzes beside girls that might be her daughters, with unwilling partners who might be her sons—who enters a room dancing a step, and leaves it humming a favorite polka—who laughs at her own jests with an artificial giggle intended to be juvenile—who is so busy with the frivolities of life that she really has not time to grow old—who would not allow herself to be old if she were a hundred—who feels it a personal affront when any one in company alludes to young ladies as being past their *première jeunesse* at thirty, or as apt to grow fat on the verge of forty—who is for ever trying to pass off the September of her days for June—who cannot be young, and will not be old.

Miss Perceval was a splendid specimen, in excellent

preservation, of the 'wonderful woman!' By candle-light she seemed unimpeachably juvenile, with a step still rather elastic, hair not above two thirds grey, and her dress most skilfully contrived so as to conceal or to display her figure in the most becoming manner; while her cousin, Captain Grey, laughingly remarked that 'Emily's age never could be divulged unless it became customary for people to be potted and labelled like his mother's preserves—"Black currant jelly, 1854."'

Laura, on her birthday, was seated, after Peter's arrival to dinner, at the window, when, with a merry laughter-loving expression dimpling round her beautiful mouth, she suddenly turned round, exclaiming—

'Uncle David! here is a treat for you! If my old eyes and spectacles do not deceive me, there come our daily visitors, Emily Perceval, more flagrantly dressed than ever, and her tiresome dogs, Ditto and Scrip! They are at this moment rounding the corner of Charlotte Square. That will certainly be the signal for "excit uncle David in haste!"'

'She comes, indeed!' exclaimed Harry, 'wearing the usual feather in her bonnet, negligently hanging in a sort of romantic Ophelia style, all on one side! Miss Perceval will die in a feather!'

'It is hardly so light as the head!' muttered Major Graham, ferociously. 'Oh, for a fire-escape! that we might all get away: but my dear mother cannot become accustomed to looking over the blinds in her own room, and seeing the footman assuring visitors that she is positively out, paying visits—"just gone along the street, and might almost be overtaken yet!"'

‘People who are endlessly tiresome, like Emily Perceval, waste so much of other people’s time as well as the whole of their own, that they ought to be strangled!’ observed Peter. ‘It is a positive robbery! Her tongue is worse than a hundred parrots!’

Lady Harriet here put in a few conciliatory remarks on behalf of her expected visitor, saying: ‘You all waste a great deal of good hatred on poor inoffensive Miss Perceval, and she is really not worth it. Her mind is not built quite in the Corinthian school of architecture; but I cannot imagine mere officious good-nature like hers exciting any vehement emotions one way or other.’

‘Good nature, Lady Harriet!’ exclaimed Captain Grey. ‘She would walk five miles any day to pick up the smallest piece of scandal, and ten if it were very ill-natured. She could as easily ride on a broom-stick as talk one word of good sense. My cousin Emily, like all persons who live much alone, wearies your attention by boasting of every trifling civility that any human being has ever paid her. When you meet with those who live in a solitary home, they generally entertain you with a million of nothings, describing who was “so delighted to meet them,” in one place, and “so sorry to part with them,” at another—who crossed the street to inquire how they had been for “an age”—who admired their bonnets, and who invited them to tea. If Miss Perceval has an invitation out to dinner, I have seen her ask every person she saw for a fortnight: “Are you to dine at Lady Glentilt’s on the 15th?” as if a dinner-party were a thing for the whole town, and that every one left out were reduced to obscurity.

Miss Perceval's whole conversation consists of such shreds and patches, all relating to her own insignificant self. In short, she is a fantastic idiot, from whom I would defy any one to extract a single presentable idea !'

'I have made a useful invention lately, Peter, of what would admirably suit your cousin, which is very nearly brought to perfection,' said Harry. 'It is an automaton listener, which can fix its eyes for any given time upon whoever addresses it, and is made to turn them up when necessary, as well as to utter an occasional assent or exclamation as may be required. I have orders for one, from several clubs in London, to be made with a very large button to hold by.'

'Miss Perceval's conversation always reminds me,' said Major Graham, 'of that woman described by Dr. Johnson, who, not having learned music, nevertheless bought a grand piano, on which she strummed at random night and day, without harmony, meaning, or connection, till the neighbors indicted her—as I mean to indict Miss Perceval—for a nuisance. Our friend arrives primed with all the anecdotes she has picked up in the course of the morning—tells everything ill-natured that can be told of anybody—and, when she is pumped out, watches for a lucky start to get away.'

'Peter ! let us try to set her agoing again with a panegyric on Uncle David,' whispered Harry, aside. 'It is so amusing to see how he flinches under it, gets into a rage, and tries to stop her ; but he might more easily stop the Thames with a straw. She never mines the matter on account of her unfortunate

victim being present. In Uncle David's case, however, she gets no cake for her flummery. I scarcely know myself when she adorns me with every perfection under the sun, and a great many more. Here she comes now! crossing the street with that perpetual portrait-painter's smile, and positively out-waddling any duck in a farm yard.'

'With so many fascinations, besides so much ease and address, one wonders that my fair cousin has hung on hand so long,' exclaimed Peter, taking up the newspaper. 'It seems odd that, as every man gets a wife apparently as soon as he wishes to marry, every woman with a genius for matrimony, like my cousin, does not also obtain a husband when she chooses.'

'You forget, Peter, that there are plenty of charming ladies to fall in love with at any time,' said Laura, archly; 'but where are any tolerable men to be found?'

'What a cruel hit, Laura! It is very discouraging; but I must wrap myself up in my own conscious merit!'

'A very thin great-coat, Peter! Pray try to make it better.'

CHAPTER IV

‘I show no respect where I never can feel it;
And as for contempt, take no pains to conceal it.’

WHEN Miss Perceval entered she gave a sweeping glance of eager expectation round the room, but evidently drew a blank in the lottery of anticipation, as not a vestige appeared of Sir Edward, who had gone to dine with the Commander-in-Chief. The newly arrived visitor was, however, too good a tactician to betray more than a momentary cloud of disappointment, which she concealed effectually from Lady Harriet, though not from the more acute and satirical observation of Captain Grey, who slyly watched, over the edge of his newspaper, all that passed.

‘My dearest—dear—*dear* Lady Harriet!’ exclaimed Miss Perceval, as she entered, uplifting her hand, to intimate that for worlds she would not give her venerable friend the trouble of rising. ‘You must have been wondering excessively what has become of me for an age past! It is, indeed, a hundred years since we met; and I am sure there has been the same regret on your part as on mine. The fact is, Lord Ardverekie would take no denial, and really

made me a prisoner, on my *parole* of honor to remain—he was good enough to say that, as he had set his heart on having a pleasant party, it could only be so if I came, and that it could only continue so while I remained. Dear, kind, old man! he is only too partial! I wanted to come away fifty times, but he always insisted that it was breaking up the party—that if I left, nobody would care to remain; so, what could I do? If people will take so favorable a view of me, I can only say that everybody thinks more of me than I think of myself! I am, indeed, the most diffident of human beings, and require all the good opinion of all my friends to keep me on tolerable terms with myself. How the whole party at Glenptarmigan Castle could have been so enchanted with my music as they all were, was to me quite unaccountable. I really, to say the truth, live in a continual state of surprise to discover the opinion my friends have formed of me——’

‘You might well be surprised, indeed, if you knew it,’ muttered Peter, with a look of quiet contempt:

“O! wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oursel’s as others see us!”

I may say, cousin Emily, that you certainly are like nothing on earth but yourself.’

‘Exactly what Lady Glentilt said yesterday! I never could have anticipated or guessed, unless she had so kindly told me, one half of what was said of me by the Ardverekies, and others that must be nameless.’

‘Your admiring cousin, Sir Fitzroy, for example?’

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asked Peter, in a careless tone, but fixing on Miss Perceval a keen eye from which there was no escape. 'He appeared as devoted to you yesterday, at the Zoological Gardens, as any ancient knight of chivalry, and you both seemed quite worthy to be caged up with the Happy Family.'

All the party were surprised to perceive the effect produced by these few apparently accidental words of Captain Grey, who was himself the most astonished observer of all. Miss Perceval colored the deepest scarlet, and gave a penetrating, suspicious, angry glance at Peter; but he began buttoning his glove with so unconscious an air that she seemed relieved from her apparent anxiety, and made an effort to begin such a new and vigorous effervescence of small talk, that it reminded Major Graham of champagne when a crust has been thrown into it.

'My kind friend Lady Glentilt, dear Lord Leamington, and those excellent Didcots were delightfully attentive all the time; and nobody is so grateful as I am for the smallest atom of kindness. I have such very warm feelings: and as for that good creature the Duchess of Brechin——'

'What a whirlpool of rank and fashion you have been in!' exclaimed Peter, admiringly. 'Did you meet my particular friend, Lady Grosvenor Square, or that good creature the Marchioness of Billingsgate?'

'If that is meant for a joke, Peter Grey, I never should have guessed it! I met everybody at Glen-tarmigan Castle that ought to be there, and nobody who was otherwise than most agreeable: which is

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not always the case here;’ replied Miss Perceval dryly; but, afraid of having betrayed too much temper, she added, ‘The Duchess of Brechin is, you know, a cousin of your own.’

‘I believe she boasts of being so! I had a telegraphic despatch from her this morning, inviting me to her ball in Belgravia to-morrow. As the “Times” newspaper says, “we have no objection to Dukes,” I might perhaps say, Emily, of your Duchess, as Gibbon remarked about her Grace of Devonshire, “She was made for something better than a Duchess.”’

‘Poor soul!’ sighed Miss Perceval, who piqued herself on sighing gracefully, and did it especially in talking of her great acquaintances, for whom she seemed always to have some mysterious cause of compassion. ‘Her Grace always says that I am nature’s own child—so delighted to make others happy, and grateful to excess for any kindness she can show me. Really, at Glenptarmigan Castle it became quite overpowering! There was I—little me!—accommodated in one of the principal rooms; riding-horses always at my command; Lord Ardverkie actually dancing with me himself, though scarcely recovered from a fit of the gout——’

‘Dancing in his velvet shoe and flannels?’ asked Harry, bursting into an uncontrollable ecstasy of laughing, and going off almost convulsively into a second fit after he had recovered from the first; while Miss Perceval’s eyes flashed fire upon him for some minutes, and then, with a strong effort, recovering herself, she added, in her blandest tone, to Lady Harriet—

‘One can never help laughing with Harry, for, whether his joke be a good or a bad one, he enjoys it

so heartily! As I always tell Sir Edward, his spirits are as gay and as natural as the song of a bird. He throws his own merry spirit into everything, with such an air of enjoyment that it must be a heavier heart than mine which he could not enliven. I quite delight in such a hilarious, well rung-out laugh, it so reminds me of——’

‘Now, Miss Perceval! I have been quite sufficiently punished with praise,’ interposed Harry, becoming suddenly composed, and wishing himself a thousand miles off. ‘You remind me of the Jesuits who used to poison their enemies with perfumed gloves and sugar-plums. I must apologise for laughing; but the idea of good, fat, old Lord Ardvreckie, a man on the shady side of ninety-five, who used to dine with Oliver Cromwell, attempting the light fantastic toe, rather overcame me!’

A pause ensued, as the whole party were evidently waiting in the hope that Miss Perceval might take the opportunity to withdraw; and Major Graham ostentatiously drew out his watch, with an air as if very much afraid of being too late for some important appointment. Whenever one person produces his watch in company, it becomes a signal for every other individual who carries one to do the same; and Miss Perceval looked at hers, saying—

‘Pray, Major Graham, as your watch is still in your hand, what is the exact hour? Mine is a very slow goer?’

‘I know a goer still more slow,’ grumbled the Major almost audibly. ‘I perceive, Miss Perceval, it wants but seven minutes to my mother’s dinner-time.’

‘Now, Major! you really are the most good-natured misanthrope on earth! How very kind of you to mention it!’ replied Miss Perceval, hastily untying her bonnet-strings. ‘It suits me perfectly to remain, for I am quite vulgarly hungry, and this will be a capital opportunity for a chat while I eat what servants call their “bit of dinner.” It was so kind in you, Major, to think of this welcome invitation; but you were always my best friend. Harry, will you hang my bonnet carefully on that screen, and throw this silk handkerchief over it to keep off the dust? I have a horror of dust. It is one of my weaknesses, which dear Lady Didcot laughs at.’

The Major was a man not very easily surprised, but he and the whole party sat around Miss Perceval in mute amazement at the ease with which she had so unexpectedly incorporated herself amongst them. Their whole ingenuity in baffling her intentions appeared at fault, as no remedy occurred to any one within the verge of politeness, and whatever was beyond that they all knew Lady Harriet, in her own house, would not suffer. Miss Perceval, therefore, with a half-awkward and half-defying look, resolutely kept her ground, though what could be a sufficient motive to make her remain so obviously against the wishes of every one present, which she evidently felt conscious that it was, no one but Peter hazarded a silent guess.

‘It was really kind of you, Major Graham, to announce dinner in this unceremonious way—quite treating me as one of the family—just the thing I like! and, to be as frank as yourself, I am prodigiously glad to meet your good intentions half way, rather than return to

my solitary chicken. Dear Lady Glentilt was quite uneasy about the small sparrow-like breakfast I ate to-day : and as for dinner, the Ardverekies were sometimes in a perfect uproar to see if any rarity rarer than another were to be had that I could fancy.'

'Then I positively cannot recommend my grandmother's pot-luck to-day,' said Harry, earnestly. 'Our French cook is ill, and we have no Italian at present for the pastry. Peter's last cargo of turtle from the West Indies is finished, and my uncle's champagne has all burst in the bottle, owing to the late snow-storm.'

'I shall take my chance, Harry; and, though I prefer the sunny side of an apple to the green one, yet I am not quite so spoilable as to dislike a good plain dinner, with a cordial welcome for the best sauce.'

No sooner were the ladies retired, after dinner, than Major Graham drew a long sigh, as if relieved of an hundred-weight, and having filled a bumper of sherry, took several rapid strides up and down the room, with his brows knit and a look of most unusual irritability in his countenance and manner, saying, as he at last planted himself on the hearth-rug—

'This is utterly intolerable! My mind requires to be aired, shaken out, and dusted after such a visitation. My good kind mother must not really be bored to extinction, and teased in this most tormenting way, by a frivolous gossip. What on earth brings that odious woman here?'

'To eat for three, and talk for ten. Emily is evidently, as the hospital report says, on full diet,' replied Peter, cracking his walnuts. 'I'll trouble you for a guest with only half a set of faculties and a ten-gossip

power of nonsense. Emily Perceval is so enterprising in fastening herself on everybody's hospitalities, that the castle guns might fire every time she dines at home.'

'Perhaps, Uncle David, she reckons you amongst the number of her victims, of whom Miss Perceval's list, I am told, is endless, and varies every day. I am sure she played off upon you every variety of fascination to-day, and every kind of smile that ever was invented,' said Harry, cutting a smiling face upon an orange, while the Major began again walking a solo up and down the room. 'The ingratiating smile, the joyous smile, the courteous smile; but still you looked as grave as a mustard-pot. She certainly intends mischief in this house, and if you are not the object of her manoeuvres, my father is. People never, you know, ask the question they are most interested about at first, but you may observe that Miss Perceval's second inquiry, when she sits down so fawningly beside my grandmother, always is—"When do you expect Sir Edward home?"'

'Such an idea never occurred to me before,' replied the Major, pausing with sudden seriousness. 'I trust Miss Perceval may never be enabled to double her single-blessedness in that way. Often as I have urged my brother to marry again, it would be better for him, or any one, to live as lonely a life as the laughing hyena in Wombwell's menagerie, than to chain himself to such a companion.'

'Surely it must be a gossiping impossibility,' interposed Captain Grey, in a musing tone. 'If Sir Edward had a dozen hearts, he never would throw away one on this fantastic piece of absurdity who calls me her

cousin. I know Emily is in the eight-and-thirtieth year of her youth ; but what cannot hair-dressers and milliners do in these days ? Emily has been all her life a bad shilling trying to pass for a guinea ; and as for her conversation, it is more unprofitable when listened to than thrashing water to raise bubbles ; but she is enraptured with herself if no one else is. In short, the whole report about Sir Edward must and shall be impossible ; therefore, Harry, let us never dream of such a misfortune again. We both deserve condign punishment for having let such an aggravating idea intrude for one minute into our thoughts, and for having suggested it to "UNCLE David."'

But Major Graham continued still in an uncomfortable nervous fidget. He read over Sir Edward's last letter with unwonted attention, drummed fiercely on the chimney-piece, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, forgot to finish his wine, made a gesture of annoyance, and, finally, desiring Harry to say he would not come up to tea, he hummed a tune rather discordantly at the window for several minutes, and then hurried away, slamming the door with unusual empressment as he left the house.

'I am afraid,' said Peter, 'we have set your uncle's hair on end with consternation, and he is gone to get it dressed again. Now, as you are the best of all earthly Harrys, do assist me in a little trick that I have a special reason for desiring to try on Emily Perceval. I wish to ask her some questions that Peter Grey dare not do.'

CHAPTER V.

‘And still, as each repeated pleasure thr’d,
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspir’d.’

GOLDSMITH.

LADY HARRIET had retired to bed, when Harry, who looked like the king of fun and frolic, joined Laura and Miss Perceval in the drawing-room, saying how unlucky it was that Peter and Uncle David had both departed, especially as an old messmate of Grey’s was below stairs anxious to meet him, and very much disappointed that they had missed so narrowly. ‘But perhaps, Laura, you might like to see a straight-from-Tipperary Irishman?’ added Harry, giving her a sly look, and an almost imperceptible wink. ‘It is Captain Blake, whom you remember long ago, of the Termagant 74. Peter, you know, Laura, has been long expecting him. Speaks with a brogue, has a squint and a stammer, and was almost cut to pieces on the African station—half blind with ophthalmia too, and still wears green spectacles. Don’t you recollect how dangerously he was wounded in the forehead at Acre, and has been obliged to wear a wig ever since?’

Laura endeavored to look as if she recollected what-

ever Harry chose she should remember, and waited in silent, rather perplexed, expectation, until her brother ushered into the room Captain Blake, a tall, high-shouldered stranger, in a travelling cloak, who advanced with that rolling step peculiar to naval men, and, making his bow with a sort of graceful awkwardness to Laura, instantly in a paroxysm of shyness turned his back to the ladies, and with a strong Irish brogue apologised to Harry for this unseasonable intrusion.

‘I might have known my old messmate Pater better than to hope he could ever be found when wanted; but if ever Grey is neither expected nor wished for any where, there he appears!’

‘Then he must appear very often, said Miss Perceval, half closing her eyes, after a supercilious glance at the new arrival, who seemed too insignificant to excite in her either curiosity, surprise, approbation, or disapprobation. ‘He can always get unlimited leave of absence from me, and I scarcely can fancy any circle in which he could be wanted.’

‘Very true! I must say, though he has always been my messmate and particular friend, yet if you knew him as entirely as I do, you would think still less of Pater Grey! Let bygones be bygones, but I could tell you one or two things about him——’

‘What?’ asked Miss Perceval, eagerly raising herself from her reclining position. ‘Anything wrong? I never doubted he would often get into mischief.’

‘Mr. Graham,’ said the stranger, in a very audible whisper, and looking full at Miss Perceval, ‘I always understood that Lady Harriet was a very wonderful

woman—very wonderful indeed for her age—but I really never should have guessed her, as she sits there so upright and cheerful, to be your grandmother—never!’

‘Of course not!’ replied Harry; ‘the room must be very dark before you could make such a blunder. This lady, Miss Perceval, is a cousin of Peter Grey’s, and now tell us all about him.’

‘Is Grey a cousin of Miss Perceval’s? Excuse me, then; I dare not before a relation ——’

‘Oh, never mind me! I can stand anything you choose to say of Peter. He is my special aversion!’

‘But relations who abuse and hate each other will not sometimes allow a stranger even to hint a fault. Trust me, madam, I always know the time of day, and when to hold my tongue.’

‘Low be it spoken; you cannot say more in disparagement of Peter Grey, cousin though he is, than what I shall be delighted to hear; and if he were to be broke to-morrow, I would neither be surprised nor very sorry. He should never be named but in an indictment; so now go on!’

‘Ah! indeed!—Well, a lady cannot be wrong,’ said Captain Blake, ‘Grey is, *entre nous*, intolerably conceited, and used to say that though handsome he could not help that, but he really did find himself inconveniently admired, and wished he could contrive sometimes to look ugly.’

‘I never saw him look otherwise!’ exclaimed Miss Perceval, indignantly; ‘his weather-beaten face seems modelled in terra-cotta!’

‘Exactly, or gutta-percha! Peter’s complexion is

like the bathing-woman's at Brighton, but he used always to laugh about some ridiculous cousin of his own who never forgave him for comparing her complexion to strawberries and cream, a Miss ——, Miss ——, no matter what, for she must have been married ages ago. She was engaged only last year to a Sir Fitzroy something, who——'

'Nonsense!' stammered Miss Perceval, coloring violently, and throwing herself back on the sofa; 'you were telling us, Captain Blake, about my particularly disagreeable cousin, Peter Grey.'

'He can impose upon anybody. I have heard him talk like Bishop Cavendish, or Dick O'Brien the horse-dealer. Really, Matthews or John Parry were nothing to him for masquerading. He could pass himself off upon you for Madames Devi or D'Egville.'

'No! no!' replied Miss Perceval, lazily closing her eyes; 'I should know him even in a bonnet and veil. Unless he were to wear the iron mask itself I could detect him. It is not very easy to over-reach me!'

'Wait till he tries,' answered Captain Blake; 'he never fails in anything. 'I used to tell Grey he was beyond Sir Isaac Newton, who had only picked up a few shells on the vast shore of knowledge, but he had picked up millions.'

'They must have been very empty shells in his case,' observed Miss Perceval, rising to go, as her carriage was waiting. 'If you put a pea in Peter's head, it would rattle like an empty bladder! Good night, Captain Blake. Good night, Laura, and excuse my giving a candid judgment on your old friend and admirer, Peter.'

Laura, turning to the stranger, now jestingly brandished her knitting-pin, and lightly touched his arm, saying archly—

‘If you were born an Irishman, remain so; but, if you are Peter Grey, return to your original form. Well!’ added she, seeing him continue immovable, ‘if you are not Captain Peter Grey, I do not know who is. You seem as fixed and immovable there as the gilt anchor over the Admiralty!’

Peter started up, and, divesting himself of his cloak, wig, spectacles, and other accoutrements of disguise, exclaimed: ‘This really is the pleasantest holiday of my life, Laura!’

‘You are still the old man, Peter—full of tricks upon travellers; and that last really was too bad.’

‘Then, if you disapprove, I shall never do so again, Laura, till the next opportunity. No! believe me, I now disown all connection with a certain ill-bred, mischievous rascalion that you most inconveniently remember long ago, who bore my name. The firm is dissolved! I have turned away my former self.’

‘I hope not, for that personage you allude to so disrespectfully was rather a favorite of mine; have we not always been like brother and sister?’

‘The connection of brother and sister is a sort of hum-drum, quarrelsome, unsentimental, unsatisfactory affair,’ said Peter, discontentedly, looking down and coloring. ‘It may do very well for Harry and you; but—but, Laura, there is a love worth that of a dozen brothers. I have lately been reading a great deal of poetry, and taking a complete course through the

circulating libraries, which has been excessively improving, and you cannot think how changed for the better I am ever since. Indeed, I am thinking soon to write a naval novel, full of love and sentiment, or to be the hero of such a one myself, if I could engage the right heroine to act her part.'

'You are best as you are, Peter,' replied Laura, laughing and coloring at the unusual embarrassment of his manner. 'Nevertheless, you deserve really to be put in the corner for flourishing off in that impromptu style to-night. Oh, Peter, what trash you did talk!'

'Well! you good, worthy, scrupulous Laura, is there any harm in astonishing a very weak mind? The mere sight of Emily Perceval sets all the mischief in me afloat, till I scarcely know whether I am in my right senses or in my wrong senses,' replied Captain Grey, in an apologetic tone. 'I shall speak the unadorned truth, however, now, in saying, that my only earthly ambition, from June till January, is to please you. Many a dark stormy night at sea you were the companion of my thoughts; and the name of Laura Graham has been written, with a dirk, on the sands of the Persian Gulph; scratched on the rock of Teneriffe; screamed by a parrot in Java——'

'How immensely polite it makes people to travel abroad! You only want the mustachocs, and might then be called Count Pierre,' answered Laura, with a quiet glance at Peter, while her countenance brightened with color and smiles. 'We shall have Harry next making civil speeches to all his *ci-devant* partners, like the lover in an old comedy; but between friends, like

us, it seems absurd and inconvenient. Such flounces and trimmings to conversation are only for strangers like Lord Leamington, or Captain Blake of the *Ter-magant*, now promoted into the moon.'

'Well, Laura, whenever I see a quiet, excellent, always-in-the-right man, like Lord Leamington, I feel immensely inclined to kick him down stairs; but, for myself, I fear you know me too well. I shall never hold any other place with you than as Peter Grey of scape-grace memory, playing the truant from school, and hiding my books in a hat-box.'

Next day, Major Graham sat over a bottle of claret with Sir Edward, who had arrived only a few minutes before from a review. The Baronet was giving an animated description of his visit to Lord Ardvreckie's, where it seemed to have rained, not cats and dogs, but grouse and black cock, as the success of Sir Edward had exceeded his own hopes, and made a very distinguished paragraph in the '*Inverness Courier*.' His shooting had averaged a bird a minute during five hours, and his 680 brace had quite extinguished the honor due to Lord Glentilt and the Duke of Brechin, for bagging only 540. 'What a joyous time we had at Ardvreckie, to be sure! A whirl of amusement from dawn till day-light again.'

'I suppose the whole scene was, as Miss Perceval eloquently expresses it, "so jolly,"' replied Major Graham, looking earnestly at Sir Edward's animated countenance, in which he traced an expression of lurking humor which he could not quite account for; '*Glenptarmigan Castle* is reckoned a pleasant house.'

‘Pleasant! a thousand times more than pleasant! everything in it goes well. The dullest person becomes enlivened there, and not a moment ever hangs heavy. We had a French cook, a capital stud, unlimited shooting, music, billiards, chess, whist, and Emily Perceval!’

‘Emily Perceval!’ exclaimed Major Graham, ‘she certainly is the most odious style of womankind I know!’

Sir Edward paused, gave an astonished glance at his brother, cracked several walnuts in silence, tossed off a bumper of claret, and then said: ‘You perfectly amaze me by this change of opinion, David, as Emily Perceval has told me a thousand times what an extreme partiality, almost beyond mere friendship, you have for her; and what a favorite she is of my mother’s——’

‘Emily Perceval a favorite of anybody’s! Oh! the unbounded deceivableness of man! I’ll trouble you, Edward, for a total impossibility, unless, as the poet says: “One fool always finds a greater to admire him,”’ exclaimed the Major indignantly. ‘No one but Emily Perceval herself could ever have said that; and she must have done so knowing it to be false. If ever my mother indulged in such a luxury as having a favorite antipathy—a pet aversion—it would certainly be no one on earth but——’

‘Excuse me, David,’ interrupted Sir Edward, in a tone of agitation which startled his brother. ‘It is a delicate subject to speak upon; but between you and me, my dear brother, there never was a concealment, and there never shall be, if I can help it. I have

been, as you know, so much abroad and so little with English ladies, that, not being aware of that susceptibility concealed under a delicate reserve—in short, brother, at Ardvreckie, hearing from Miss Perceval herself how great a favorite she has always been of one whose judgment I so much respect as my mother's, that my children are never so merry as when she is with them, and that you make a point of her remaining sometimes to dinner when she only intended a morning visit—seeing her partiality to whatever in the most remote degree belongs to our family, and being haunted by her with stories of Harry and Laura whom she so idolises, I was led on, at Ardvreckie, to be more in her society than was perhaps quite prudent, though not aware of her being almost engaged to marry her cousin, Sir Fitzroy, till—till—till, in short, she one day consulted me, David, on some affair of business, and gave me, by mistake, the wrong letter to read. I plunged at once into the contents, without either of us being aware of her blunder, until I discovered it to be an epistle from Sir Fitzroy, vehemently complaining that, for my sake, he had been cruelly jilted, but giving her finally up. This was an accidental appeal to my honor not to be trifled with, as no lady ever could make one, I trust, under any circumstances, in vain. Miss Perceval unwillingly confessed that, for my sake, she had broken off with Sir Fitzroy. His letter was certainly well expressed, and full of deep regret, but——

Major Graham gave a contemptuous whistle, and, springing from his seat, walked hurriedly about the room, pale with consternation, and muttering between

his teeth: 'It is a vile fabrication—a conspiracy—a plot of Sir Fitzroy's—swindling rascal!'

'Besides,' continued Sir Edward, in a tone of unanswerable good sense, 'you know from experience, David, that the man who is exhorted to marry never does; therefore this may, perhaps, be a lucky accident. As you are always wishing me to try the experiment again, why not now? All girls in a country house seem to me much alike—well-dressed, good-humored, and musical. Miss Perceval, in conversation is particularly light on hand, lively, and companionable; while, with her extreme love of Laura, she would make an excellent kind step-mother, which is my chief object. Gentlemen do not, you know, ask the character of a young lady as they do of a servant before engaging one—whether they are good-tempered, and obliging, excellent accountants, and play well on the harp or pianoforte; but Miss Perceval is, luckily, of a suitable age, as I shall never make a fool of myself by marrying a Miss in her teens.'

'Marry anybody but Emily Perceval, Edward, and I shall be the happiest of brothers!' exclaimed Major Graham, in accents of the gravest consternation. 'She and her family have not a respectable idea amongst them. I should think any man deserves the inmost recesses of Bedlam, and no mistake, who thought seriously, for an hour, of making Emily Perceval his wife.'

'Then bring a strait waistcoat for me;' answered Sir Edward, with rather a constrained effort at a laugh. 'I am sorry she has sailed so much in the north of your good opinion. What a very different impression

she has! Miss Perceval thinks herself the greatest of all favorites with you, and often expresses her surprise what you can see to like in her so extremely. I never met with any one who speaks more humbly of herself.'

'I detest talkative humility, and do not believe in it. Emily Perceval humble! that is quite a new character for her to appear in.'

'Well, I wish the world were peopled with better men and women too; but Miss Perceval is a fair average person, a good talker, an unweariable listener, most devoted to me and mine, not overburthened with wit, but very good-natured.'

'I doubt the good nature! At least, if she has any, then Emily is the first of the family so endowed.'

'I do not expect perfection, but Miss Perceval and I being both beyond the age of romance, can only hope to walk down the hill of life as cheerfully as we may together.'

'But, Edward, my dear brother, you are not yet beyond the age in which to form an attachment, in depth and refinement, far beyond the mere boyish frolic which, to very young men, marriage generally is. I believe that, for persons of matured mind and feelings, there may be, and is, a strength of attachment, founded on principle and on well-considered esteem, of which younger minds are incapable. Such an attachment is, however, far above the range of a character like Miss Perceval's.'

'I never was in love with Miss Perceval,' replied Sir Edward jestingly, 'nor certainly should not have shot myself had she adhered to Sir Fitzroy; but

having discouraged him on my account, what can I do? It would be also much for Laura's happiness. Such is my estimate of the advantage to a girl of having a mother that ——'

'That you almost think a bad one better than none,' interrupted the Major impatiently. 'Try elsewhere, Edward, whether you could not yet find one the model of all our dear Laura ought to be, of all her own mother was. Let it be one likely also to make her happy, for truly Laura's is a heart that could easily be broken. She needs kindness, and is accustomed to it.'

'*Cela va sans dire!* The race of bad step-mothers is quite extinct in the world of late. Like ghosts and witches, nobody believes in them now. Miss Perceval talked often with tears in her eyes of having been my poor wife's particular friend ——'

'Pshaw!' muttered the Major testily, turning to the window and grinding his teeth with vexation. 'Whenever a man wishes to marry again he begins by pretending that the lady is the very image of her predecessor, though the one be a blonde and the other a brunette, after which they are declared to have been the dearest of friends, even though they never met in their lives.'

'Certainly, nothing in nature can be more desolate than a companionless old age, especially for men,' observed Sir Edward. 'Women enjoy a variety of small desultory resources. All have their "cronies" and gossip, knitting and tea-parties; but life without sympathy and association seems a dreary blank for a man like myself, addicted to a chat and a rubber. It

is never too late for any man to marry so long as he can get a suitable lady to accept him, though on such a subject, David, you are scarcely a competent judge. You are considered, Miss Perceval tells me, a perfect Timon, and the young ladies are to present you as a testimonial some day with a heart of stone !’

‘No, Edward ! I have not always been the callous being, as you know, that Miss Perceval describes,’ replied the Major, smiling, to conceal very deep emotion. ‘Nothing, certainly, is more ridiculous than such reminiscences from the old —, such “empty echoes of a passion crushed and gone ;” but I should be ashamed of myself did I possess so little human sensibility as never to have indulged in plans and hopes of earthly felicity, resting on its holiest and best affections. You know, Edward, how these were blighted and extinguished ; on that subject, therefore — on all connected with the best and dearest hopes of this life, for me the bitterness of death is past.’ Major Graham paused, making an effort to steady his voice again, and to regain his usual tone of careless ease, but for a moment or two it failed. At length he added, in a tone of lively indifference—

‘If by any mischance I had, in a rash moment, married such a piece of tinsel and frippery as Miss Perceval, I should have been very much tempted to — to —’

‘Well, David—what ?’

‘To pitch her out of the window !—My dear Edward, that over-done vivacity, and the little frivolous fantastic simper, would drive any one distracted in a

week. I trust, brother, I most earnestly trust,' continued the Major, startled at Sir Edward's increased confusion, 'that you are not entirely pledged to Miss Perceval.'

'Irrevocably!' replied the Baronet, in a hurried but peremptory tone.

On hearing this very unsatisfactory announcement, the Major bit his lip with vexation, and muttered to himself in an accent of smothered despair, but seeing Sir Edward watching his countenance, he hastily collected his scattered brains, wishing to do what was kindest and best.

'My dear brother, I shall, for the future, draw a very long black veil over all I have hitherto thought of Miss Perceval, and for your sake endeavor to like her,' said Major Graham, making a stupendous effort to conquer himself, and grasping his brother's extended hand with affectionate cordiality. 'May she prove deserving of the best and noblest heart that lives on the earth—may you, Edward, be as happy as I wish, and there will indeed be nothing left you to desire!'

'You were always the best fellow upon earth, David, and if every body resembled you, this would be a far pleasanter world to live in,' replied Sir Edward, preparing to light a cigar and go out.

Major Graham suppressed a groan of vexation; he did not even indulge in a sigh nor in a disparaging look, when the incongruous image arose to his mind of Miss Perceval as the wife of his admirable and distinguished brother. He silently wrung Sir Edward's hand, hurried to the sanctuary of his own room,

double-locked the door, as if he would willingly have locked out every unpleasant recollection by doing so, and remained for some hours alone. This was to him one of those periods in life so filled with irreparable regret that time he thought could only deepen, by the current of events, the amazement, dismay, and utter disgust in which he anticipated a connection with so unexpected a sister-in-law presumptive. 'I wish,' sighed he, 'that the nearest apothecary could sell one a dose of indifference, with which to meet such events in life! The demand for it would sometimes be enormous.'

CHAPTER VI.

‘I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse: borrowing only lingers and lingers it out, but the disease is incurable.’

FALSTAFF.

THE definition of a gentleman is said to be ‘an individual with no visible employment or means of subsistence;’ and in these respects, though in no other, Sir Fitzroy Perceval might, perhaps, have considered himself a gentleman. It could scarcely be told whether he had been oftenest, in recent years, black-balled at the clubs or refused by ladies of fortune in marriage; but in both ways he was a frequent candidate for election, though often hitherto unsuccessfully so because his name was branded as belonging to one of the most reckless profligates in the kingdom. If a new edition of Tytler’s Scottish Worthies were extended to commemorate also the Unworthies, Sir Fitzroy might be a valuable acquisition to that list, for his life and adventures had been full of incident more entertaining than creditable. As an old Dutch proverb says: ‘Let my house be burned, let my anchor fail, let my ship be lost—and yet I can redeem myself; but if I lose my honor, I lose everything!’ Sir Fitzroy had continued, during the fifty-five long years of his life, to be placed

in that very tantalising situation, so trying to the best regulated minds, and in his case so ruinous to the worst, of being next heir but one to a very magnificent estate—Oakhampton Castle in Northumberland—the seat of his cousin, Lord Edenthorpe. The present incumbent, or incumbrance, as Sir Fitzroy considered him, now a very old man, had been once the most talented statesman of his day, gifted with learning, ability, and almost unbounded income. He had an only son, now on the very brink of attaining his majority, of whom very little yet was known or conjectured; but it certainly might have excited some wonder in those who interested themselves at all on the subject, how the young stripling had contrived to outlive the complication of imaginary illnesses and accidents which Sir Fitzroy, his heir presumptive or presumptuous, occupied himself in attributing to him. It certainly did surprise the many creditors of Sir Fitzroy Perceval that young Lord Cheviot still existed, when they heard from ‘the best authority,’ as Captain Grey remarked, namely, from the Baronet himself, that the future young peer had, during four successive years, been dangerously ill of the measles, thrice recovered from the hooping-cough, and that he had dreadfully alarmed poor Sir Fitzroy by being thrown from his pony at the very time when the Baronet’s creditors were so extremely clamorous, that nothing short of the young heir’s skull being fractured could have quieted them. Accordingly, it was currently reported that ‘the undying one,’ as Peter called Lord Edenthorpe’s son and heir, had fractured his skull; but still he obstinately lived on, and presumed to come of age,

without any apparent intention to vacate his position in the world.

Sir Fitzroy, gay and unprincipled himself, looked upon every man as only a more successful hypocrite, who maintained a better reputation, and the worse his associates were in morals or conduct, the more eagerly he defended them, with an eloquence and plausibility peculiarly his own: but nothing astonished his contemporaries more than to see an utterly ruined man, bankrupt in fortune and in character, professing to be so happy. His laugh was still the lightest in every company, though the friends he might have gained by his lively humor were lost generally afterwards by his reckless love of a jest, which he always carried as far as it would go, or rather much farther, since it often ceased to be a jest at all long before he would let it drop, without his caring at whose expense it might be carried on.

There were a few members of his own club, however, who maintained that he was 'the best fellow upon earth,' which generally means the worst; but who could offer no solution to the deep and increasing mystery of how, without begging, working, or stealing, he contrived to exist. Frequent reports arose that he had reached his last shilling; that he could not pay the postage of a letter; that the baker and butcher had become rebellious; that his tailor was in a state of clamorous mutiny; and that his servants were ready to discard themselves: but still Sir Fitzroy triumphantly scrambled on through every difficulty, entertaining men of ten times his income with a degree of luxurious hospitality, which few except those who

were ruined themselves could have attempted to rival.

The manner of Sir Fitzroy was gentlemanlike, but for a few vulgarisms, the most conspicuous of which was the extreme familiarity with which he talked of all great men, so long as they were not within hearing. No peer seemed to have a title with Sir Fitzroy, for dukes, earls, and marquesses were all indiscriminately deprived of their rank. 'Brechin, Didcot, Ardverkie, and Leamington,' might as well have been Americans, for any chance they had of ever receiving rank in Sir Fitzroy's conversation, and even the bishops were 'Exeter and Gloucester,' when he spoke of them.

On one occasion Captain Grey laboriously collected in various quarters the visiting cards of all those with whom Sir Fitzroy professed to be intimate, and, having left them spread out on his table, contrived to accompany the Baronet home, who read with astonishment all the distinguished names which had been left for him; but at last exclaimed in a voice of amazement, which overcame his companion's gravity, and caused Captain Grey to burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter: 'The Lord Mayor! What can have brought him here?'

If the French philosopher be right, who asserted that happiness consists in having a bad heart and a good stomach, the Baronet enjoyed every prospect of perfect felicity, for his cook was inestimable, and his cellar unrivalled. Nothing came amiss to him in the way of sport or amusement, whether hunting, fishing, shooting, golfing, curling, whist, billiards, or *écarté*; while, with every additional bottle of his

own exquisite wine, Sir Fitzroy's wit seemed to brighten, his sallies to become more frequent, his stories to be more pointed, and his songs more numerous.

‘Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd hersel' among the nappy.’

Good, worthy, sensible men had at last given over regretting Sir Fitzroy, as a man who had wasted great gifts in only rendering himself the more conspicuously censurable; but to his aged relative, Lord Edenthorpe, he was an object of the most unqualified abhorrence. His name was never heard at Oakhampton Castle, and the resolute old peer announced in answer to various manœuvres by which Sir Fitzroy intimated his intention to visit there, that his shadow should never darken the walls until the present owner was carried out. There were not wanting persons to tell Lord Edenthorpe how anxiously the extinction of his line was anticipated by Sir Fitzroy's many creditors, whom the Baronet had assembled once when young Lord Cheviot was supposed to be dangerously ill, desiring them to drink his health as next heir at last to Oakhampton Castle, Manningtree Abbey: and, as Sir Fitzroy complacently added, ‘the best of all estates, a capital house in London, having for pleasure-grounds a good look-out upon Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. And thus you see,’ added the Baronet complacently, ‘life may be compared to a game at puss in the corner, for when one leaves his place another runs into it.’

Though the young heir still, in a most unprincipled

manner, recovered, to Sir Fitzroy's utter discomfiture, yet as the Baronet laughingly said, 'though disappointed ninety-nine times, he might hope still to be more fortunate on the hundredth;' and, in the meanwhile, his life being one long-continued falsehood, he tried a perfectly new anodyne for the anxiety of his creditors, by mysteriously whispering that the young heir was not only weak in health, but equally weak in his intellects. 'It would be quite necessary,' he said, 'if the old Lord ever did die, which seemed doubtful, to set aside the young man as incompetent, and to have him placed under trustees, among whom he must, of course, be appointed one;' and he looked volumes of mystery and anxiety when he spoke of 'his unfortunate young relative, whom no one was ever allowed, for the best of reasons, to see.'

Sir Fitzroy had always another magnificent juggle with which to pacify his creditors, by announcing his marriage to an estate or a jointure, no matter how unpleasingly encumbered by the lady in possession. It was but a few months since that, when his cousin, Emily Perceval, having apparently succeeded, through a recently deceased uncle in India dying intestate, to that nabob's immense fortune and estates, Sir Fitzroy, upon the very shortest notice, proposed to her, and was believed to have been so successful a suitor, that he proceeded to London on a day's notice, with full powers to prosecute her claim.

The expected marriage of Sir Fitzroy to his cousin, Miss Perceval, so suddenly promoted to the dignity of heiress-ship, caused the less astonishment, as he

had always kept up with her an off and on flirtation, supposed to have reference, in his own far-seeing mind, to the possibility of this succession falling due at last; and few were surprised when he as suddenly broke it off, on discovering in London that a will had been subsequently transmitted from India, in which the old nabob-uncle had bequeathed his whole estate, as the makers of wills usually do, to the richest of his relatives, and the person to whom it could be of least use—Lord Edenthorpe. From the hour of this unwelcome testament being discovered, it would have been difficult to say whether Sir Fitzroy or Miss Perceval took most pains to contradict the report of their matrimonial engagement; and the lady's anxiety to do so was probably increased by the report of her cousin's inextricable difficulties, and by the recent arrival of Sir Edward Graham from the Continent, with whom she had immediately renewed the intimacy of former years.

CHAPTER VII.

'The morning came, the chaise was brought,
But yet was not allow'd
To drive up to the door, lest all
Should say that she was proud.'

COWPER.

No human ceremony excites an interest so keen and universal as a marriage; and truly, if two persons are publicly executed, or disastrously killed by a railway accident, the attention excited is nothing compared with that which arises when two individuals are about, by mutual consent, to marry; especially if they be a little past the usual age for romance and sentiment. Every living individual feels called upon to sit in judgment on the suitableness of the happy pair, in respect to age, fortune, temper, appearance, birth, and prospects; while the slightest flaw in any of these respects is brought to light with eager criticism, and hung up before the public eye on the nail of notoriety. It is a bold step, therefore, in any enterprising individuals beyond the juvenile age of poetry, to step forward as the butt of every eye and every tongue, to be laughed at most perhaps by those who most envy them, and to be blamed by those who are probably the next to follow their example.

All the ingenuity of man, or of woman either, could not find any fault with Sir Edward Graham, except one, and that was, the extraordinary and most unaccountable choice he had made; but whenever that branch of the subject came under discussion, heads were drawn closer together, bonnets shook, shoulders were shrugged, faces grew longer, and voices became lower; but it is certainly surprising that people will continue to wonder at extraordinary marriages, when almost every marriage is extraordinary, and each person invariably chooses the very last mortal that any one would have considered suitable. There had been fifty ladies, young and middle-aged, thought of for Sir Edward Graham, every one more eligible than Miss Perceval—one with money, another with rank, another with beauty, another with endless accomplishments: but all agreed that he had fixed on one who had none of these—the very last indeed that any match-maker could have conjectured.

No theatre ever was more crowded on a benefit night with spectators, invited or uninvited, than St. John's Chapel on that momentous day when Miss Perceval bestowed her hand on Sir Edward Graham. Expectation had long stood on tiptoe, and carriage after carriage drew up, while party after party of splendidly dressed visitors alighted in a ferment of expectation and excitement. From the dean in his surplice to the pew-opener, nothing could be more perfect than the whole scene. The bride herself appeared a moving pyramid of satin, blonde, feathers, lace, and orange-flowers, with a splendid embroidered pocket handkerchief clasped before her face to conceal the tears that

did not flow ; and for various reasons she had resolved not to faint, but stood at the altar in an attitude that might have done for a statue of ' Modesty.'

As Miss Perceval's friends and contemporaries, including even Lady Glentilt, had never ceased to wonder at Sir Edward's very surprising 'choice,' the unbridled curiosity of many to witness the ceremony of a marriage generally considered more prosperous than romantic, induced so many to volunteer their attendance that the pews, the galleries, and even the pulpit itself, were all invaded by a mob of well-dressed ladies, elbowing and jostling each other to obtain 'a good place'; and a whispered hum of interest and curiosity was kept up during the whole ceremony. To see under the very bonnet and veil of the bride, and to pry into the most sacred emotions with which Sir Edward approached the holy altar to become 'the happiest of men,' seemed an achievement which no one thought it ill-bred to attempt, while dozens of smiling eyes and of merry tongues made their remarks. Never, in short, as Sir Fitzroy Perceval remarked, did the Gordian knot of matrimony appear more securely tied, and before a greater crowd of credible witnesses; while he seemed himself to feel very strange in a church, having so seldom entered one.

The whole scene gave entire satisfaction to all those uninvited spectators who had been so prodigal of their presence, and most of whom seemed to feel as if it had been got up entirely for their morning recreation. After the ceremony had been concluded, and the brilliant wedding party was crowded promis-

cuously together in the vestry to sign their names as witnesses, Sir Fitzroy, who had, with all due decorum and gravity, given his cousin away, now approached her, and whispered with a sneering and rather insolent look, apparently half in jest yet more than half in earnest, a few hasty words. The newly-made Lady Graham started visibly; the smile with which she began to listen remained unfinished; her bridal blushes faded instantly away to the most pallid hue, and she shrank back from Sir Fitzroy, looking unutterable anger and alarm at him, which was observed by Major Graham with a degree of surprise and perplexity never afterwards forgotten.

The endless *déjeûné* was at last ended, healths drunk, and all the usual speeches spoken—hoping that the bride's-maids would next officiate in a yet more important capacity, and that the gentlemen would all follow so good an example. When the wedding-cake was distributed, Major Graham felt as if it would have choked him to taste it; after which he tried to lead off the three-times-three and one cheer more with an aspect of cordial good-will, but it was a signal failure. The little crowd in the street 'hurrah'd' themselves hoarse; and the bride, theatrically drowned in a perfect Niagara of tears, was supported to the carriage.

Sir Fitzroy gave a low, short laugh as the postilions triumphantly cracked their whips; Sir Edward waved his handkerchief; and at length the four greys, decorated with favors, dashed off in full career, as if life and death depended on their speed; while the final cheers of the surrounding mob were greatly

invigorated by a shower of silver, thrown out, according to custom, as a farewell offering from the departing bridegroom.

Some months elapsed, during which Sir Edward and Lady Graham lingered in the Highlands; but when Harry and Laura first took up their abode with their father again in Edinburgh Lady Graham seemed to enter cordially into his eager desire that they should be happy. To please him, she perfectly courted popularity with them; while they, according to the earnest advice of Lady Harriet, met more than half-way every apparent wish she had to be on terms of cordial affection; and whatever plan of pleasure or amusement Lady Graham or Sir Edward proposed, they both entered into with the liveliest interest. Nothing, however, promised them such unbounded pleasure as the announcement that Sir Edward, though unable himself to accompany them, had accepted for the whole party an invitation to luncheon on board H.M.S. the Benbow, which had arrived for a few days in Leith roads, commanded by a hospitable captain and officers, who intended to keep open house on deck, and had given Captain Grey an unlimited *carte blanche* to invite any number of friends at any time to inspect the ship.

Harry was in ecstasies and Laura delighted when the appointed hour came, seeing that—contrary to the usual rule for parties of pleasure, especially at sea—the day was bright, calm, and clear; while every shadow had evidently been sold, as not a shade was on sky, earth, or ocean, and the atmosphere of Lady Graham's humor seemed equally propitious.

The haze of the early morning had gradually dispersed, and the sunshine blazed unchequered by a single cloud, while the sea was like molten crystal. Peter, as he waited in the drawing room to escort the merry group, was in his most brilliant glee, and, till the ladies were bonneted, cloaked, and shawled, ready to start, he carolled, in the joy of his heart, with a sailor-like voice full of richness and power, as he walked up and down the drawing-room like a quarter deck—

‘ the hour is nigh :

The sun has left the lea,
The orange-flower perfumes the bower,
The breeze is on the sea.
To beauty shy, by lattice high,
Sings high-born cavalier.’

‘Bravo, Peter!’ exclaimed Harry, admiringly. ‘You want nothing but a guitar!’

‘And a shy young lady,’ added Lady Graham, glancing maliciously at Laura. ‘I suppose many bright eyes have smiled upon that song, in the various sea-ports you visit, Peter?’

‘Of course! thousands! The moment I began, the Spanish ladies in their mantillas used to look smilingly out, and, after throwing me a large bouquet of geraniums, let down the long tresses of their golden hair from the upper *jalousies*, that I might climb up as on a ladder of ropes.’

‘But what has become of our “high-born cavalier,” Lord Leamington?’ added Lady Graham. ‘Don’t look so surprised at his being enlisted, Peter, for we were all dying to ask him. Indeed, to some of us the party would have been a failure without

our favorite cavalier ! and as you have unlimited leave——’

‘Quite a mistake ! The captain particularly said to me : “Above all things, avoid bringing that too-good-for-this-world young peer, Lord Leamington, for I am told his conversation is so heavy it would sink the ship.”’

‘He is a very superior young man, and a very great favorite in some quarters,’ replied Lady Graham, allowing her eye purposely to rest on Laura, who was looking indifferently out at the window. ‘Do you see Lord Leamington coming yet, my dear girl ?’

‘No !’ replied Laura, coloring with surprise and turning hastily round : ‘I forgot he was expected !’

‘Oh, Laura ! As Peter says, “tell that to the marines !” Well, young ladies will be young ladies all the world over ; and you may justly be piqued at his want of punctuality. Shall we punish Lord Leamington, by not waiting ? I dare say Peter will vote for our jilting him as he deserves.’

Captain Grey gave one rapid earnest glance at Laura’s unconscious countenance, sparkling with the anticipated pleasure of her voyage, and evidently not a thought crossed her mind of any hidden meaning in Lady Graham’s words : therefore he turned gaily to his cousin with a deferential smile, saying—

‘By all means let us wait for your invited guest ; it is a privilege of the peerage always to be last ; and Lord Leamington, as Laura and I have in this instance agreed, is well worth waiting for. - There he is !’

“By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.”’

‘Yes! there he is, and driving that beautiful phaeton. Laura! look at those glossy bay horses, your favorite color; and the coronets sprinkled so tastefully over the harness. Well!’ added Lady Graham, with a malicious glance at Captain Grey, ‘I wish we all had such equipages.’

‘I am perfectly satisfied with my own,’ replied her cousin carelessly. ‘This favorite walking-stick of mine is my cab, riding-horse, and brougham; my double-barreled gun, fishing-rod, and special constable’s staff; my constant companion, and my never-failing friend.’

Before Lord Leamington entered, Peter had plucked his own hair over his eyes, pulled up his collars, drawn down his wristbands, raised his shoulders, and stuck out his chest, till he had rendered himself so exact a counterpart of the young peer that Harry and Laura were thrown into a state of visible astonishment at his wonderful powers of masquerading; for it seemed to them as if even Lord Leamington’s own tutor might have been deceived by the look of booby self-importance with which Peter marched up in silence to the hearth-rug, and stood there snuffing the air as if he saw no one in the room but himself.

Never was there a more officious chaperon than Lady Graham chose to be on this her *début* in that character with Laura, whom she ostentatiously consigned to the special care of Lord Leamington, giving him strict injunctions to take care of ‘her dear girl,’ during their voyage.

‘One might imagine we were going to double the Cape at least,’ observed Peter with imperturbable good-

humor. 'I provided patent safety swimming belts for each of the party, which have but one fault—that they are very apt to turn people upside down in the water, and the last time I used mine it took the Humane Society a fortnight to restore me.'

'Peter! write poetry, for your style is much too imaginative for good, honest, matter-of-fact prose!' said Lady Graham, stepping into a ten-oared boat which waited at the pier to receive the nautical party. 'Here we are, as Moore so beautifully expresses it, with "joy at the prow, and"—I forget what "at the helm."'

'Moore should be proud of his admirer,' answered Peter, slyly; and then, with a mischievous look at Lady Graham's dog Ditto, he added: 'This boat always leaks when an atom is added to the number now embarked.'

'Then you may get out, but Ditto must get in! Lord Leamington, do take care of Laura,' continued Lady Graham, disdaining to notice the hit at Ditto. 'Miss Graham is so very timid, and really these waves seem mountains high!'

'So ladies always say; but, Lady Graham, who is embellishing now?' asked Captain Grey politely making way, with a look of admiring deference, for the awkward young peer, who seemed very little able to take care of himself. 'Philosophers have discovered that no wave rises above thirty feet high, which is a matter of fact that will sadly spoil your future description of the shipwreck we shall probably suffer to-day.'

'A poetical wave is, on the most moderate com-

putation, as high as if we pitched over that steeple and came down on the other side,' said Harry, listening with pleasure to the light dip of the oars and to the gurgling sound as they cut through the transparent water. 'But, as the old schoolmaster said, "if Britannia rules the waves, I wish she would rule them straighter;" for it would be unpleasant to suffer shipwreck on the savage island of Inchkeith, and to sail home on an oyster shell.'

'I once saw a whole fleet of them,' exclaimed Peter. 'In those undiscovered seas where the Thunderbolt was so long stationed we perceived one day a number of singular objects floating on the water; and when they came nearer I found that it was a squadron of oyster-shells, each of which contained a savage. The creatures all came into our ship, carrying their shells along with them; and, when about to take leave, tossed their boats into the water and jumped down into them. The extraordinary part is yet to come, however; for these savages have a superstition against getting their heads wet, and as there came on a dreadful shower of rain—would you believe it?—I saw them deliberately get out of their shells, and sit on the surface of the water, while using their boats as umbrellas.'

'Very remarkable!' said Lord Leamington, putting on a look of intelligent interest. 'Fish, and those sort of things, must have been on a large scale indeed there!'

'Yes; the bees were as large as sparrows.'

'Indeed!!! and what size were the hives?'

'Oh!' replied Peter, absently, for he was looking

at Laura's dimpling smiles—'they were just the ordinary size.'

'But how could that be when the inhabitants were so immense?'

'Oh! let the bees look to that: they never consulted me. Now, Laura, I must introduce you to Her Majesty's ship Benbow, the first man-of-war I ever served in; and look what a towering palace on the water she appears! Observe her lofty masts, her sides dented with balls. If I have a weakness on earth—or on the wide waters—it is my pride in that old veteran, the gallant Benbow.'

'A gem of the sea!' said Harry, in a rallying tone, 'with a ball ready for friend or foe, for dancing or fighting. Even her minutest motions go as well as those of the best time-piece of Harrison.'

'Yes. It was in the very year I joined that William the Fourth honored us by perpetrating the only pun that our Sailor King is ever supposed to have made in his life, and which you will find engraved in gilt letters inside the wooden walls. His Majesty had proposed to intrust to some lounging, idle dandy captain a very hazardous exploit; but a remonstrance being made that he was not fit to encounter so difficult a task, the King replied: "Then we shall spare our beaux, and send our gallant Benbows."'

'But did you go?' asked Lord Leamington.

'Oh yes! and were all massacred, after performing prodigies of valor. I had six horses killed under me, and three legs amputated; for which I got a considerable pension, and expect yet to be knighted. Now, here we are, beside the wooden walls of Old

England; and if the Benbow ever wants a figure-head, I would accept the appointment rather than remain always on shore.'

Lady Graham had taken the opportunity of this excursion to make herself as thoroughly ridiculous as the occasion could admit of, by assuming a great deal of graceful timidity and very tedious affectation. It might have been imagined that she and Ditto were the only persons in the boat who had lives to risk or to take care of at sea; and, when they were all about to be hoisted on board, Peter obligingly offered that Ditto should be harpooned and hauled up first. When the party came under the lee of the Benbow, and measured her gigantic height above the water, without any symptom of an accommodation ladder to assist the ladies on board, Lady Graham's terror become real, and her tongue proportionably vociferous. Words seemed, however, to fail her when she espied a chair lowered by a rope, wherein she was expected to seat herself and be hauled up like a spider on a thread. For once Lady Graham became willing that others should take the precedence on herself; and watched, with terrified excitement, while Peter arranged a large flag on the chair, an end of which he carefully wrapped round the smiling Laura: then, having earnestly enjoined her to hold the rope firmly on each side, as he by no means wished her to furnish a paragraph for the dreadful-accident maker of the 'Dumfries Herald,' he gave a shrill whistle, immediately after which Laura found herself suspended, like Baillie Jarvie, 'atween sky and earth.'

All Lady Graham's little panics and pretty exclamations of alarm put off so much time that Peter became seriously apprehensive of the whole excursion being ruined; but, with a degree of humor as well as of good-humor, which surprised and amused Harry, he at last soothed and persuaded his cousin into trusting her precious person into the obnoxious chair.

'Now, Lady Graham, off you go, suspended, as you justly remark, on a pair of skipping-ropes,' observed Peter, gaily. 'And you might say to us who are coming after you, as the needle says to the thread, "I'll make you be fain to follow me."' The chair, being instantly launched, reached the deck, as might have been sanguinely anticipated, in perfect safety.

When the ladies descended below to inspect the ship, it appeared as if they never were to reach the bottom, seeing that there seemed always a lower deep to fathom; and Harry compared it to a house turned upside down, with the garrets below; while Laura, addressing Peter, pointed out, with a smile of approbation, the motto assumed by the Benbow, and marked with large brass nails over the captain's cabin—

‘DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR.’

‘Have many of your captains been killed in battle on board?’ asked Lady Graham, holding her salts to her nose, to drown, as she said, the smell of pitch and tar. ‘I do not remember to have heard——’

‘Don’t you recollect Nelson being in the Benbow

at Trafalgar?' whispered Peter, indignantly; while the gravity of his manner was contradicted by the merriment sparkling in his eye. 'I am President of the Society for the Suppression of Ignorance; and, really, Lady Graham, the officers are all evidently very much hurt, now, at your forgetfulness.'

'Ah! yes! I thought I did ——'

'And Lord Duncan,' whispered Peter in an admonitory tone, his lips quivering with laughter—'have you forgotten Camperdown, where the Admiral said, because he was a Scotchman, that England expected every man to do *his* duty?'

'Very true! Really, I ——'

'You must read up your admirals again, Lady Graham, before we honor Neptune with a second visit. I scarcely believe you remember even the battle of Blenheim, when the Duke of Marlborough took six sail of the line, and blew up Admiral de Winter's ship!'

'I do recollect, now that you jog my memory a little, something about that: and, *à-propos* of fire, what a number of disgusting tallow candles are burning in every direction here, without any one apparently taking the slightest notice of them.'

'Yes,' added Lord Leamington, 'and the smell is odious; but in those little cabins belonging to the officers the candles are wax.'

'And,' said Harry, 'they seem left there in a state of solitary conflagration, which would scarcely be considered safe in a house of brick and mortar on shore.'

'Your valuable statistical remarks shall all be duly

reported to the Admiralty, or told to the marines, to-morrow,' said Peter, with a lurking smile. 'And next time you all come on board, the Benbow shall be lighted up with gas. Here is the powder-room, where no light is allowed except through those windows of double plate-glass, beyond which you perceive one pale silvery lamp dimly glimmers, and is kept constantly burning.'

'How very dangerous!' exclaimed Lady Graham, hurrying away: 'it is like living in a loaded gun! You should keep the powder always damp, except when it is immediately wanted.'

'No, no! we prefer following the advice of Oliver Cromwell to his soldiers, when fording a river: "Trust in Providence, and keep your powder dry." It is remarkable, however, that no British man-of-war has ever yet been blown up owing to the powder magazine igniting, though foreign ships so often are.'

'Then depend upon it yours will be soon,' exclaimed Lady Graham. 'I never yet heard any one boast of anything without their immediately meeting, on that very score, with some great mortification, that they may never do the like again.'

'That would be a severe cure for me—sharp and short!' answered Peter, with a dismal bow. 'We had fourteen shot through the Benbow at Acre, without a single man being touched. The fifteenth would have killed me.'

'Indeed!' said Lord Leamington, vaguely.

'Very lucky for your friends and the public that it was saved the trouble. There is quite enough of

lead in your brain already,' said Lady Graham. 'Laura! do you not see that Lord Leamington is offering you his arm?'

Peter gave a sly glance at the awkward young peer, who, as an amateur sailor, certainly had not yet acquired his 'sea legs,' and who received from Laura more assistance than he gave. It certainly seemed a happy mixture of danger and dignity, while they stumbled forward together after the graceful young Captain, who now ushered the whole party down to the 'mess room,' where six hundred sailors were at tea. Lady Graham, with audible expressions of the deepest disgust, contemplated the strong brown decoction, like porter, which they were all drinking, served out in pitchers at various little tables, where the crew sat down in detachments of six or seven.

'That tea never saw China!' exclaimed Lady Graham contemptuously. 'But how the vulgar wretches seem to enjoy it! I shall not be able to endure my tea for a week.'

'Hush!' whispered Peter, with humorous composure. 'That old sailor is pouring out a cup for you! The whole ship's company will be offended if you decline the civility. Perhaps Lord Leamington would take it off your hands, for his nerves are stronger, and it would help him to attend upon Laura. The tea, like myself, is not so bad as it looks; and there, behind you, is a barrel of the vinegar which our men are in the habit of taking as a sort of Harvey-sauce to their salt beef. Now, ladies, your activityships, after so much exertion, and after the sight of so much luxury, must be hungry; and here

is the captain's cabin, with the best entertainment for man and horse: chicken fixings and ordinary doings, as we say at New York.'

'Laura! Lord Leamington is waiting for you!' said Lady Graham, in a fierce reproving whisper. 'You do so strangely forget yourself that really I blush for you!'

Lady Graham was always blushing for other people, though never on her own account; and Laura had not forgotten herself—but she had so completely forgotten Lord Leamington that Lady Graham indignantly took the young peer's arm, and, in a state of unmistakeable wrath, walked away; while Captain Grey amused his friends for an hour with good-humored mimicry, comic songs, Italian buffas, and playful toasts, or burlesqued political speeches.

The evening had closed in before any one of the well-amused party could think of returning to shore; and they were all much diverted to watch the sailors taking their hammocks from the deck to the stairs, and looking like a procession of ants carrying their eggs. The darkness became at last so intense, however, that Lord Leamington was literally groping his path towards the gangway; while Peter called out to Lady Graham, who had relapsed into a state of vehement affectation—

'You will know whether you are going the wrong way, Lady Graham, as soon as you plump into the water!'

'I would give a year of my life to be safe on shore, for I have a horror of drowning,' said Lady Graham, affectedly, to Lord Leamington. 'It is such an untidy death.'

‘I am sure if Venus saw you rising out of the sea she would be jealous,’ observed Peter politely; but Laura turned her lustrous eyes on him with a look of admonition that reduced him to prudence again, while he gravely added: ‘We shall have a cap-full of wind in returning.’

The descent was indeed formidable, even to the strongest nerves; when at length, one by one, each adventurous individual of the party was placed in the chair and lowered into an abyss of darkness, until ‘all hands’ were reëmbarked. No doubt some ladies have been actually drowned or guillotined without making a tenth part of the uproar with which Lady Graham thought it becoming on this occasion to display her interesting timidity; and the hospitable captain, apprehensive at last that she intended remaining till day-light, complied with her request to summon several additional sailors, who assisted in lowering her.

‘Be sure not to faint on the way down, for this would be by no means a good opportunity,’ said Peter, preparing to descend himself. ‘Put it off till I have received you safely into the boat. See how every stroke of the oar, as it advances, seems to scatter a handful of diamonds over the sea. Now who volunteers first for the forlorn hope?’

Accidents will happen sometimes to parties of pleasure, and an accident did now occur. Lady Graham had been safely and carefully handed into the boat by Peter, and was about to be seated, when a sudden lurch threw her somewhat off her balance, and, with a little affected scream, she grasped hold so

suddenly of Lord Leamington's arm that, in the act of entering the boat, he was thrown off his balance, staggered back, and must have become instantly precipitated into the sea, but for the instantaneous quickness of Captain Grey, who caught hold of Lady Graham's cloak, and nearly fell overboard himself in impeding the fall of Lord Leamington. The whole danger seemed successfully averted, when Lady Graham suddenly uttered a piercing scream of agony on discovering that, in the terror and fright of her own personal danger, she had let Ditto fall into the water, and that already he was swept beyond all apparent possibility of being rescued! With a cry of mingled grief and consternation, she sank helplessly down, vociferously screaming out, to attract attention from the ship: 'A man overboard!'

At any other time Captain Grey would have laughed, but now he felt almost sorry, both for the pampered spaniel and its mistress. Such was the utter darkness that scarcely an object remained visible except a white speck of foam where it might be supposed that the unfortunate animal had fallen in. Amidst the confusion of sounds, the rushing of waves, and the impenetrable darkness, however, no trace of him could be seen. Almost before Lady Graham had fully realised the calamitous catastrophe which her own awkwardness had caused, Peter Grey, having fixed his eye on the white spot amidst the dark waters, plunged into the sea, and was eagerly searching through the depths of ocean, swimming and diving alternately, in the hope of discovering the lost favorite; but in vain.

As fear makes more danger than it prevents, Lady Graham added all she could to the risk and confusion by incessantly screaming and clinging to as many of those around as she could seize, while Harry hurriedly disengaged himself from her hold, and with astonishing coolness, directed, as well as assisted in taking, every means to avert the danger from Captain Grey, who seemed now in real hazard of being swept off by the current and lost in the darkness. The boat's crew in the meanwhile having thrown out ropes at random in every direction, Peter, when striking out his arms, accidentally, after being very nearly exhausted, caught hold of one, and, giving a hurried signal to be hauled in, he was, before many minutes, restored to his place in the boat, bearing along with him the unfortunate Ditto, now in a complete state of suspended animation.

The party instantly hurried on shore, where, at the nearest hotel, a fire was lighted; and, after nearly an hour of most agitating suspense, the restoration of Ditto seemed complete, though Lady Graham, who officiated in reanimating him herself with unwearied zeal and activity, observed that, for some weeks afterwards, Ditto should be considered an invalid, and treated accordingly, as his circulation, though in some degree restored, was still very languid, and his nerves very much shaken.

'Peter,' said Harry, 'you deserve the gold medal of the Humane Society. That was a noble plunge!'

'Into my native element, Harry. I am a fish out of water on dry land: and you know that salt water never wets a sailor's jacket,' replied Peter, while fastening a new lash to his hunting-whip. 'We have tried all the

elements in turn to-day, and I am glad to see this bright fire at last. Laura, you are shivering?’

Miss Graham was indeed trembling with agitation; and, as Captain Grey led her towards the fire, a hot tear dropped upon his hand, which he hastily kissed away, while the color rushed to his cheeks and forehead, but for some minutes he said not a word; then, in graver accents, added—

‘Ditto and I must indeed feel thankful to-night that we have not for a grave the foaming billow. This is not the first time that I myself have been on visiting terms with the whales and mermaids, who are my old and intimate friends; but two such precious lives are not often at hazard, especially Ditto’s. Laura, I should gladly leap again into the water this minute, merely to be told candidly, had Ditto and I become a *bon bouche* for the sharks, what share of regret, more than for the loss of a carpet-bag or a thimble, you would have bestowed upon the humblest of your slaves, Peter Grey.’

‘Quite as much as you could wish or deserve,’ replied Laura, blushing and smiling. ‘Next after Harry——’

‘Pshaw! what signifies Harry? You owed me, at the very least, a broken heart, Laura, or I should certainly have haunted you.’

‘A most ridiculous-looking ghost you would make, Peter!’ exclaimed Laura, laughing. ‘In full uniform, of course? But you are quite supernatural enough already. I would rather see anybody’s ghost than yours.’

‘Now, tell me, is that a compliment, or is it not? Shall I be angry or pleased?’

‘As long as you survive, it is needless to decide that

point,' replied Laura, with a half-shy, half-humorous glance. 'In the meanwhile, we all like you best as you are. I delight in being superstitious, and would not part with my sublime and poetical terror of the supernatural for any vulgar common-place realities; but the pleasantest way of being haunted by an old friend is as a partner in a quadrille, or during a ride in the Park.'

'Peter Grey,' said Lady Graham, affectedly, 'you are the best of men for saving Ditto: and, now, will you further oblige me by shooting that asthmatic flageolet-player in the street, who torments me daily by performing under our windows? It is more plague than pleasure to have so exquisite an ear as mine, for anything short of perfection is torture to me. You may give us a stave or two yourself, now; for, really, when one forgets Lablache, one can listen to you.'

'A Scottish troubadour!' said Captain Grey, good-humoredly laughing. 'I have a rare and valuable collection, all surreptitiously stolen, of every song to be found in the manuscript-books of young ladies, over which they write "Not to be copied." They would enchant you, but, unfortunately, I am afflicted with that severe cold so apt to visit all first-rate singers when they are asked to perform. This east wind, and——'

'Ah! we know all about that, Peter; but, unless you recover instantly, I shall make it a personal quarrel,' said Laura. 'If you go much out of tune, we can put cotton in our ears.'

'Well! I cannot command success, but let me, at least, deserve it by trying; for I would rather you were made happy than myself. Harry, stand before me, for I feel most inconveniently shy.'

The young Captain leaned gracefully back in his chair, and sang, with wonderful taste and expression, the song of 'Doughty Deeds,' which, in spite of his 'unconquerable shyness,' he evidently intended for Laura—

'I'll wear thy colors in my cap,
Thine image at my heart;
And Leamington, who seeks thine eye,
Shall rue it to his smart!'

CHAPTER VIII.

‘What now to him is all the world esteems.’

CRABER.

SURROUNDED by all that wealth could purchase or luxury devise, within the ancient walls of Oakhampton Castle, in a gorgeously furnished dining room, adorned with ancient pictures and massive plate, sat a singularly handsome young man, of a somewhat foreign aspect, whose black dishevelled hair hung in a cloud of massy curls over his large star-like eyes, the lustre of which contrasted singularly with the marble stillness of his pale and finely chiselled features. As his last lingering servant vanished noiselessly from the room, the young Earl of Edenthorpe, whose father had that day been buried, pushed back the dark hair from his forehead, and gazed around on apartments grand and silent as a church at midnight; a sigh of deep despondency burst from his heart, the only sound which had been audible for hours; and then, folding his arms on the table, he leaned forward his head, and again buried himself in unbroken silence.

The autumn breeze whirled sadly past every window, laden with rustling leaves; the struggling moonbeams

streamed at intervals through the tall casements, while a pale melancholy gleam rested on the old ancestral portraits suspended for centuries around: yet, not more silent or immovable were those ancient pictures, frowning from their gloomy frames, than the young descendant of so many ancestors, in his first day of solitude at Oakhampton Castle.

The splendid park and gardens around, commonly called the pleasure-grounds, had been no scene of pleasure for many years past to any one, being so strictly preserved by the recently deceased Lord that a traveller had no more chance than a poacher of being welcomed within the gates, and a sketcher with his pencil was as carefully excluded as a sportsman with his gun. By his neighbor, Admiral Grey, it was alleged that if old Lord Edenthorpe could have even locked up the river, so that it should find no thoroughfare through the grounds, he would have ordered a key immediately, and that, but for the expense, he would have appointed a special keeper to watch every bird in the widely extended preserves.

Oakhampton Castle was considered by the untravelled peasantry to be a place of almost fabulous magnificence, and by the neighboring gentry to be a scene of nearly supernatural dulness. It was a hobby with old Lord Edenthorpe to possess everything most magnificent, but never to use what he had. His drawing-rooms were unrivalled throughout the county for splendor, but the oldest inhabitant could not recollect when the shutters had been unclosed, until now for the ceremonial of his funeral. His plate was splendid; but, as Admiral Grey remarked, the bride of the

'Mistletoe-bough' was not longer or more hopelessly imprisoned in a chest. His library was like a wing of the Bodleian, but within the memory of man its glass and wire fences had never been disturbed by the removal of a single volume. There were large herds of deer in the park, and crowds of game in the preserves, but none on the table; wine in abundance, but only in the cellar; and money, countless money, so safely hoarded that even Mr. Thornton, his agent, had only once contrived to see its color.

Educated in boyhood by his mother's relations at Madrid, and imprisoned of late years entirely at home by an avaricious and misanthropical father, whose sole desire in life was to engross the whole time and affections of his son to himself, as well as to exclude every rival for his notice or companionship—young Lord Edenthorpe had thus been unfitted for general society, by being entirely unpraetised in its habits, and unskilled in its ways. He was now left, by the sudden death of his father and only associate, alone—totally alone—upon the earth, at the age of two-and-twenty, without a single acquaintance, and with no near relation. Sir Fitzroy Percival would willingly have supplied the vacancy in both respects, and Lady Graham had always been most anxious to forget that there are nearer degrees of propinquity than a third cousin; but the cautious old peer repulsed all their advances, and never allowed his young heir even to see these affectionate relatives.

The late Lord Edenthorpe was afflicted with that most unpopular of all maladies—a worrying temper; so that no servant ever came there who could find

any other place; and frequently those who had been engaged for Oakhampton Castle by Mr. Thornton drew back, and forfeited their promised salary, when told that it was to the very formidable old Lord of Edenthorpe that they were hired.

From his earliest boyhood the young heir had been brought up, since his return from Spain and the death of his mother, in habits of parental subjection so rigid that, even had he wished to break through the long-continued thralldom, every successive day appeared so like its methodical predecessor, that no one time seemed to afford an opportunity more than another to make a stand for independence, or to attempt a change.

Young Lord Edenthorpe was in many educational respects the pupil of his father, who had formerly been a most accomplished scholar, and seemed to find singular pleasure in reading the ancient classics with his son; yet his affection for him was of a nature harsh and strange as his disposition. He attempted to disguise, under a tone of satirical and ironical respect, the fact that the whole cynical wit for which he had, both at Court and in Parliament, been celebrated, was now concentrated, with 'the sting of a heart the world has stung,' in the amusement of turning into ridicule all that his son could say or do. If the boy, with his naturally foreign accent, hazarded a syllable, there seemed no end to the rallying notice it excited, till, with burning blushes, he wished it unsaid. 'Did you favor me with a remark?' the old Lord would say in a tone of over-done respect, 'I most unfortunately lost your last valuable obser-

vation. You said it was a fine day? or did you say a very fine day? I am fond of accuracy where the subject is important or exceedingly original! Might I trouble you to repeat your words?’

At length old Lord Edenthorpe, with all his faults, his avarice, his love of power, his misanthropy, his extraordinary wit, his arbitrary affection for his son, and his suspicion of all the world besides, was no more. His life had been successfully passed in spending nothing, while he added £450,000 to the useless hoards already laid up for his only descendant, now left, perhaps more entirely than any other living man, alone. With an income and estate almost boundless, it might have been thought that the young Lord Edenthorpe need scarcely have a wish ungratified; but, little guessing how much his position was the envy and admiration of the neighborhood, he merely glanced his eye over a schedule of his rent-roll and ready money which had been prepared for him by Mr. Thornton, and then, folding his arms, he silently sank into either a deep reverie or a deep sleep, the servants could not decide which, but it lasted many hours.

The dull ticking of a large old clock over the chimney-piece alone broke the solemn silence which reigned around; the fire had fallen low, the long wicks of the candles flared unnoticed, the lamp had expired, and the small hours of the morning struck—while, not more still or solitary was old Lord Edenthorpe in his dreary vault than his living son in these gorgeous halls.

The *tête-à-tête* life led by these two inhabitants of

Edenthorpe, father and son, had always been a subject of good-humored, gossiping wonder to their nearest country neighbors, Admiral and Mrs. Grey, who had long enjoyed the most sociable and cheerful of domestic homes, to which their son Peter had now returned. On the evening of old Lord Edenthorpe's funeral they were assembled with their family round the fire-side at Rockingham expecting a visit from Sir Edward and Lady Graham, while they beguiled the long hours during which they fruitlessly waited tea for their expected guests, by an animated discussion of their own affairs, and of every other person's, with that good-humored *laissez aller* so characteristic of a truly united family, where the parents have succeeded in the difficult art of being not only respected by their children, but also treated and considered as their most cherished companions.

'Dear Emily!' exclaimed Mrs. Grey, folding up Lady Graham's last letter, 'certainly there never was any one who wrote such beautiful and affectionate letters. Her whole heart is on paper here!'

'Yes,' replied the Admiral, dryly, 'paper-currency does well enough for every-day use, and that letter might bring tears to the eyes of any one who did not know my worthy niece.'

'But only hear this,' continued Mrs. Grey, warmly: '“Though long absent from dear Rockingham, I have been daily, or rather hourly, present with you all in thought and in affection——”'

'Pshaw!' interrupted the Admiral disrespectfully. 'Then why has Emily remained five long years away? Are there not rail-roads, steam-boats, canals, heavy

coaches, fast coaches, and omnibuses enough in the world?’

‘But see what she so generously adds: “I always wished that your girls and myself should have but one purse, as we have but one heart——”’

‘Whew!’ exclaimed the Admiral contemptuously, ‘what did she do when Workton Abbey became vacant? Did she not instantly set that Mr. Thornton and Sir Fitzroy upon us to claim the uttermost farthing of her due, and even to threaten me with litigation? I hate that sort of “promise to pay” letter of kindness, which dishonors every draft upon it when drawn. Emily’s friendship, like her religion, is all made up of heats and chills, without any tranquil all-pervading principle. She always says more than she feels; and you, my good, all-believing wife, feel ten thousand times more than you say—therefore you trade in good offices and affection at a great disadvantage, receiving only counterfeit paper for sterling gold.’

It is, as Mrs. Grey often remarked, a very dull day that cannot be made into a cheerful evening; and the most comfortable, gay, best warmed, and best lighted snuggerly in Britain that night certainly was the small glowing little parlor at Roekingham, where the hearty old Admiral sat with spectacles on nose and newspaper in hand, rather ashamed to feel so entirely engrossed, as he actually was, with the amusement of listening to his juvenile family, all chattering merrily around; while Mrs. Grey, in her usual snow-white cap, scarcely so white as her hair, placed her large parish-basket of clothes for the poor

before her, wherein, it was alleged, she kept several miles of hemming, always evidently progressing, though apparently never to be finished. In the family chit-chat there was no effort at display, no forced merriment, no affected sentiment, but merely the natural ebullition of lively spirits, of kind feelings, and of cultivated minds. Here the unselfish affections were in full exercise, while the beauty, the dignity, and the worth of human nature, when refined and exalted by Christian principle, were pleasingly exemplified in the various individuals around, as well as the tenderness which characterises religion in the exercise of its ordinary and domestic attributes.

How different from the sombre magnificence and the desert-like silence of Edenthorpe was that joyous fire-side! To the most uninterested observer the family picture would have been beautiful, and the most successful votary of mere selfish pleasure and fashion might have sighed with envy to see how easily the simple-minded are made happy. The love of Admiral and Mrs. Grey for their children resembled the light of the sun in the firmament, as it shone upon all, and yet each appeared to have the whole, while the young people in return derived their chief enjoyment from the companionship of such parents.

‘It seems an ascertained fact,’ observed Mrs. Grey, reaching her needle to be threaded by Peter, ‘that poor old Lord Edenthorpe, during all his latter years, neither read, wrote, walked, nor visited either rich or poor; never regaled his heart by doing a liberal action, nor relaxed his purse for kindness, charity,

luxury, or amusement. What a life ! A world without sunshine ! The old Lord's only object was "to increase his store, and keep his only son at home."'

'Poor young man ! Ever since his mother's death, and his return from Spain, so companionless and solitary, with not so much as a domesticated dog to share his affections !' added Mrs. Grey, in a tone of motherly interest : 'and he used to be considered such a marvellously clever boy !'

CHAPTER IX.

‘Know, then, when Phœbus’ rays inspect us,
First, sir, I read, and then I breakfast.’

PRIOR.

ON the morning after Lord Edenthorpe’s funeral, the family at Rockingham, in full anticipation of the Grahams’ arrival, assembled to breakfast, with good appetites, good humor, and very good looks; while Peter’s eyes glittered like sunlight, as if inwardly anticipating some jest of surpassing humor. The table did not groan, but it might have done so, under the weight of silver, crystal, and china; the sideboard looked like a railway station, with its load of game and fish; the preserves, cakes, muffins, marmalade, hot rolls, and fruit, did honor to Mrs. Grey’s house-keeping; and the fire blazed with a cheering vivacity, which did equal honor to the Admiral’s skill in the poker-exercise. Never, in short, was there a better exemplification of the English word ‘comfort,’ in which Admiral Grey delighted to see even his privileged spaniels and superannuated greyhounds cheerfully partaking, for they reminded him of many a pleasant hour spent in healthful sport.

‘Well, Admiral,’ said Mrs. Grey, ‘to think of Emily Perceval being, after all, married at last!’

‘And married to such a man!’ sighed the Admiral ominously. Extremes have met, as usual on such occasions.’

‘Yes; of all the many extraordinary marriages in this extraordinary world!—But I say nothing—only, to be sure, Sir Fitzroy must feel it very odd, when everybody says ——’

‘I never believe what everybody says: everybody is a great gossip and story-teller,’ interrupted Admiral Grey, in a judicious voice, and with a precautionary glance towards the young people. ‘You always begin, as a matter of course, to talk scandal over the breakfast-table; but you know Sir Fitzroy’s affairs are not at any time very discussable—nor Emily Perceval’s either, and least of all now, when Sir Edward is almost within ear-shot.’

‘You know Emily herself once, in a benignant moment, remarked that we should not speak ill of our acquaintances, except among a few friends,’ observed Peter, helping Mrs. Grey to a fresh needleful of thread. ‘It is a peculiarity of our family, I suppose—and nobody else ever does it—to wonder over the affairs of our neighbors. At the same time, now that old Lord Edenthorpe is gone, one cannot but think how very near Sir Fitzroy is to the succession.’

‘I have no doubt he has thought of that too. Well, I could almost find it in my heart, Admiral, to pity that poor young Lord, half a foreigner here, and now left alone in his glory!’

'Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, twenty-one years of age, and with £40,000 a year, paid quarterly,' exclaimed Peter, with a gleeful laugh; 'besides no end of ready money!'

'There would be an end of it speedily in your hands,' cried the Admiral, throwing aside his newspaper with a good-humored smile. 'While I am innocently beguiling my time here with police reports, highway robberies, railway accidents, and other pleasant recreations, so that I could talk "Morning Post" with the best of you, it is a fine thing for Mrs. Grey and you, Peter, to be compassionating that rich young peer! Why, he might pay off the national debt, and still have enough left to make ducks and drakes of.'

'I wish he may make ducks or drakes either of a single penny that can be saved!' replied Captain Grey. 'The father having been the most anti-spend-a-shilling man in our county, I dare say the son has grown up, under such tuition, as close as four stone walls. Every servant in the house, both English and Spanish, I am told, had received warning last week!'

'The old peer got very little warning himself!' observed Charlotte; adding, in the magnanimous tone of one who is sure to be disbelieved, 'and, Peter, allow me to say I do pity the present Earl of Edenthorpe. If any feeling on earth could be more thoroughly heart-crushing and utterly wretched than another, it would be the consciousness that, born to the greatest advantages, with every external means of happiness crowded around him, there existed in his own internal self that heavy incapacity to enjoy any-

thing usually ascribed to Lord Cheviot. What can he do with countless hoards, though not a friend to share them, and, I am assured, a total incapacity of ever making himself liked?’

‘Yes, I am afraid he is a very poor creature, and will never come to any good now,’ added the Admiral, despondingly, taking off his spectacles. ‘No youth can thrive without roughing it at school. I must not throw stones at the old Lord’s grave now, but he should have listened to my advice——’

‘Ah! my dear Admiral! if everybody would take everybody’s advice everybody would do right! but that is the only thing people would rather give than receive,’ replied Mrs. Grey. ‘No one, certainly, requires more to remember the prayer for aid “in all time of our wealth” than young Lord Cheviot in his dreary solitude of grandeur!’

‘And if he felt in a hangable or drownable mood, not even the Serpentine within reach to throw himself into!’ added Captain Grey, with his usual blithesome laugh. ‘It is past my comprehension how the poor youth ever survived these daily airings with his proud cynical old father, for ever setting off and for ever coming home again; while, if the poor boy became at all lively, I am told Lord Edenthorpe grew alarmed that he was getting excitable, and would be delirious. None of Madame Tussaud’s wax figures look more inanimate and helpless than the tall, dark-haired, youth did at the funeral yesterday; and any one else would be ready to walk out of the world who could not make a better appearance in it.’

‘He dresses well, and employs a most unimpeachable

tailor, which is at least one duty of life that our young neighbor does perfectly, and of which I heartily approve,' said Mrs. Grey, with an admiring glance at her son's somewhat nautical costume, which was certainly put on with great attention to the becoming. 'He is remarkably good-looking; but, however unhand-somely nature may treat any of us, Peter, we are all entitled to make the best of our external advantages or disadvantages.

'My dear Admiral,' said Mrs. Grey, 'it would do your young cousin and neighbor, Lord Edenthorpe, so much good to witness a little human life and actual happiness, that we must positively open our hearts and open our doors to him. In short, Admiral Grey, in sober earnest, pray invite Lord Edenthorpe to join our family circle here soon for a few days, or even weeks.'

'Bravo, Mrs. Grey!—your pity has reached a fine climax at last! Fancy Lord Edenthorpe shrinking into our little nook of a cabin here, and listening to more nonsense in one short hour than he ever heard in a lifetime before! It would be a spirited commencement of your duties as chaperon to Charlotte.'

'Poor as we are, however, unless the young peer be more agreeable than he seems, I would not condemn one of my girls to the still life at Oakhampton, even to be a countess—no, not if all Lord Edenthorpe's thousands were converted into millions,' replied Mrs. Grey, with a glance of maternal pride and affection at her blooming young daughters. 'Our family is as good as Lord Edenthorpe's, and——'

'My dear old woman! you are so busy refusing his lordship, that you forget to sugar my tea. I am quite

convinced, Charlotte, that he really is not worth the trouble of being married to; therefore, my little enchantress, give your mother no encouragement to begin her operations.'

'Well! if my own husband is so ready to accuse me of plotting for Lord Edenthorpe, what would strangers allege? Therefore I give it up. But, my dear Admiral, may you not be rather hasty in condemning our young neighbor as a mere image? He has lived only with foreign tutors, but if he had been gifted with fifty tongues his father would have silenced them all.'

'Mrs. Grey, I am ready, if it please you, to assert that Peter is a Field Marshal, or that you are as thin as your own thread-paper, but not that young Edenthorpe is fit for anything but the Deaf and Dumb Asylum. *A propos*: I observe a very uncommon circumstance recorded in our county newspaper this morning, and have been wondering much who it can possibly refer to. Wonderful to relate, some anonymous individual has generously sent £1,000 to the Infirmary, and also £1,000 to be distributed in charity, *à discrétion*, by our worthy Rector. Such a man deserves to be rich, and knows how to enjoy the best happiness that money can purchase. I honor him!'

'So do I!—very genteel, indeed! That is exactly what I should have done in his place,' said Peter. 'How often I regale my mind by doing in imagination the most generous actions, and quite admire myself for the good I would do in other people's places! That anonymous man, whoever he be, has bought two thousand pounds' worth of happiness, and I do envy him much more than Lord Edenthorpe, with

all his hoarded millions. Sometimes, in a generous moment, I have even wished myself endowed with three thousand a year to give away; and if that is not magnanimity I know not what is! My visions of what I would do, if an unexpected legacy made me rich, are splendid! The portionless young ladies I have fancied myself assisting, the poor younger brothers for whom I have bought commissions, the old servants I have set up in business, and the neglected authors I have pensioned, would astonish you!’ Captain Grey threw himself back in his chair, evidently overcome with a sense of his own generosity.

The arrival of Sir Edward and Lady Graham next day at Rockingham, before luncheon, was a scene of indescribable joy. Harry went half wild with delight when he saw Captain Grey at Rockingham, his whole countenance expanded with a pleasurable welcome. Peter seemed the very personification of animated hospitality, and, in the forgetfulness of such unbounded felicity, he grasped the offered hand of Lady Graham with almost excruciating vehemence, while he nearly shook it off; and then, suddenly recollecting himself, whispered to Laura: ‘Last week my much respected cousin never gave me above two very frigid fingers to shake, but to-day she is almost cordial. I must really ask myself whether some unknown good fortune has befallen me. I wonder if any one has left me an estate, or if I have succeeded to a title?’

‘Or,’ suggested Harry, ‘whether you are about to make a brilliant match. Fancy in the “Morning Post”—what a paragraph!—“Marriage in high life. That distinguished officer, Captain Grey, R.N., is

about to lead to the Hymeneal altar the beautiful and accomplished Miss"—who, Peter?'

'Let me lead you to luncheon in the meanwhile,' said Captain Grey, coloring deeply, as he offered his arm to Laura: 'we can finish the paragraph another time; and,' added he in a lower tone, 'I would give much more than I am worth in the world to conclude it with any name I choose.'

It was, as the Admiral declared, a sight to make an old man young, when so many joyous countenances were gathered round him! and even Lady Graham herself, in a scene of such vivid enjoyment, could not but lay aside for a time her little affectations, and some of her newly-assumed dignity, being thawed by the warmth of her reception. It does, indeed, take a great deal to make newly-arrived guests, in a country house, feel thoroughly welcome and at home on their first arrival; but in every art of kindness the Greys excelled, and in none more than that. Before many minutes had elapsed, Sir Edward and the Admiral were pacing the quarter-deck, up and down beneath the rustic verandah in front of the drawing-room, discussing politics. Without losing a minute, Lady Graham and Mrs. Grey were confidentially seated with their feet upon the fender, drinking tea, like, as the Admiral remarked, a couple of washerwomen or mandarins; while Lady Graham discussed, with her usual bitterness, all persons good or bad, and all events past, present, or to come, and Mrs. Grey performed an obligato accompaniment of exclamations and interjections.

The reunion of Harry and Laura with Peter and

Charlotte Grey was attended with bursts of uncontrollable merriment. Such a shower of mutual questions followed that no one could wedge in an answer to one of them; and every minute there were agonies of half-suppressed laughter, which even the presence of Lady Graham could not entirely restrain. It seemed happiness enough to look each other in the face, and to hear each other's voices; while a more pleasantly arranged party could scarcely have been imagined. During more than an hour the conversation continued with ceaseless vivacity, exhilarated by many droll narratives, and, among the junior party, by many a merry jest. In the glad tumult of such a meeting every young face was glittering with smiles, while Peter's spirits, in a glow of joy and of garrulous glee, seemed, if possible, tuned to a higher pitch than ever.

The Admiral's butler at length entered with a large accumulation of letters, the produce of those two days during which Sir Edward had lingered on the road. Lady Graham, on seeing the post-bag brought in, hastily started up, eagerly attempting to gain possession of her own share; but the servant, unconscious of her hurried movement, placed the whole budget before Sir Edward, who dealt them round like a pack of cards to his expectant family. One very large consequential-looking letter, sealed with a coat of arms, attracted Sir Edward's peculiar notice, who examined the quarterings for several minutes, during which a gloomy frown gathered on his brow; but on turning up the direction he uttered an exclamation of angry surprise, and looked at Lady

Graham, saying to her, in an under-tone of more concentrated indignation than he had ever before expressed: 'Can it be possible that this letter is for you? That seal and writing are Sir Fitzroy's! I believed you to have promised me solemnly that no intercourse, except of the most distant civility, should hereafter take place between my wife and her very disreputable relative. I cannot understand your keeping up this intimacy—and I cannot allow it!'

Lady Graham's eye cowered for a moment beneath the angry glance of her indignant husband; but, by a strong effort, she recovered herself, and, to conceal much real confusion, she affected a tone of good-humored pique, saying: 'Sir Edward, you are growing peremptory! How can I prevent people writing? A beggar might send me his petition by post, and the post-bag would bring it; but does that prove that I gave him encouragement to do so, or that I ever intend to answer it? Your temper is really as hot and as hasty as the Wolverton broth. Besides,' added Lady Graham, with a look of injured merit, as a sudden thought struck her, 'if I can be of use to my pretty, interesting, motherless cousin, Anna Perceval, it would be harsh indeed not to assist her in those perplexities of girlhood, in which neither you nor her father can advise her or have any concern. Poor helpless girl! I am always too anxious about serving others, and especially my relations.'

Lady Graham, overcome by her own eloquence, in a paroxysm of self-pity buried her face in a splendidly embroidered pocket handkerchief, and in a graceful attitude of emotion walked away, carrying

the objectionable letter in her hand, of which she never afterwards made any mention ; and her husband's gentlemanlike feeling prevented his recommencing a subject so obviously unpleasant.

The breeze that had ruffled Sir Edward's mind, as usual, passed hastily away ; and when next he saw Lady Graham, though she still looked somewhat injured and indignant, the subject was forgotten apparently by both.'

CHAPTER X.

'O ye, who come to tattle in this wood,
Hold, for one moment (if ye can), your tongues !
Hush!—or, if hushing be too hard a task,
Hear but one little speech : 'tis all we ask.'

REAL happiness, like real religion, lives in tranquillity; while the noisy bustling imitation of both, which men so often prefer, is but a sparkling deception. There could scarcely have been a more obvious contrast than Charlotte Grey next morning at Rockingham, in her plain neat gingham dress, her long dark hair smoothly braided, her cool, clear, but almost colorless cheek, and the animated engaging expression of her deep-blue eyes—compared to Lady Graham, placed next her, in the over-done magnificence of her costume. Her glowing eyes and rather disordered hair looked as if she had tossed all the live-long night in a feverish dream, from which she had scarcely yet entirely awakened; while she looked languidly round her, saying, 'Charlotte, how are all the beggars? I like to inquire for everybody. And, do tell me, what Utopian schemes of usefulness are you engaged in now? I often wonder whether there be any way in which ladies can try to assist the poor which

does not do more harm than good. When I was last here you talked to me about the duty of giving in charity till I looked with abhorrence at my satin dress, and could not bear to touch my piano, thinking it had cost £100; but one must indulge sometimes.'

Admiral Grey began the morning, as usual, with family prayers; and, as he bent over the sacred page, seeking fresh instruction or encouragement from each well-known sentence, his aged head might have been a study for Rembrandt. The lofty forehead; the clear dark eye, of mild but firm and elevated expression; the silvery locks of snow-white hair; the ruddy winter-apple complexion; the linen so scrupulously clean and the coat of glossy black: all within and around that venerable old man indicated a soul-satisfying happiness, and a mind so stayed on the solid foundation of Christian principle that it might be compared to a stone lying beneath a crystal stream, over which the waves and billows of this world pass harmlessly on, while in Holy Scripture alone he looked for knowledge and happiness.

Lady Graham sat with Ditto on her lap, her whole attention occupied in keeping him quiet until the reading was over, giving him every now and then a morsel of biscuit, or a gentle pat on the head, to keep him quiet.

The perpetual click of Mrs. Grey's knitting pins, as she hurriedly tried to finish turning the heel of a stocking before breakfast, was the only indication of life she gave; while Charlotte's elegant figure and graceful head were silently bent over a small

ledger, in which she was diligently inserting an inventory of clothes and blankets, evidently to be sent out on some charitable mission. They were arranged in large masses on the table beside her, where piles of worsted stockings, duffle cloaks, blue flannel petticoats, printed frocks, printed books, tracts, and Bibles were carefully consigned to a large basket, after being duly counted, priced, and registered. There appeared no hurry, confusion, or display in Charlotte's mode of proceeding, and yet her task was rapidly completed; after which she noted down a catalogue of such books as were returned by the school-children, which all belonged to Mrs. Grey's lending library; and, finally, she proceeded quietly to pour out the tea and assemble all the stragglers round the hissing urn—when Peter drew in his chair, saying, in a tone of lively raillery—

‘Now, Charlotte! remember, you may always depend upon my giving your pensioners anything they like to ask except clothes, food, money, medicine, lodgings, letters of recommendation, or advice.’

‘You will certainly be ruined, Peter!’

‘Well, Charlotte! if I come to beggary it is said to be a most amusing life—not unlike that of a sportsman. Instead of stalking a deer, to stalk an old lady—bagging sometimes a penny from one, then a shilling from another. I met Jim Bourke yesterday, staggering home drunk with the whisky that Lady Didcot, with her usual carelessness whether she does good or harm, had given him the money for, saying she never can refuse a beggar.’

‘It is calculated that, in London alone, £100,000

is annually spent in giving to street-beggars, and to begging-letters,' observed the Admiral. 'No wonder that such vagrants abound, when there is so great a premium upon the trade. A laboring man can scarcely now afford one meal a day to his family; a pauper, living on the parish-rates, receives two good meals every day; and a prisoner in a jail has three: therefore, you see, the two most comfortable pursuits for the poor are begging and stealing.'

'But, papa, we sold several blankets yesterday to reformed drunkards, who have learned the value of their money,' said Charlotte with animated pleasure: 'old Nanny Gordon has nearly completed the sum necessary for hers, and I booked another shilling last night from poor Tom Anderson!'

'Wretched creatures!' exclaimed Lady Graham, frustrating a tremendous yawn. 'As you are treasurer of that Clothing Society, I wonder, Charlotte, you do not make up the whole very small sum for these miserable beings at once. It seem so hard-hearted to let them toil on week after week with such little trumpery deposits, and not to give them a surprise occasionally by completing the entire sum. How I should enjoy that! While you are so cool and methodical, Charlotte, I am all impulse and imagination. But the sight of that drunken wretch yesterday would disgust me with human nature for a month!'

'Vice appears in its most odious colors to you, then, being clothed with filth and rags,' observed the Admiral, drawing in towards the fire, with Peter's assistance, his large high-backed arm-chair, which

Lady Graham said was fit only for a dentist's operation room. 'You might not, perhaps, have felt so particularly shocked and disgusted to see Sir Fitzroy drinking more claret or champagne than was good for him; and yet his actual vice would be exactly similar to Jim Bourke's: or, when you saw two beggars playing at thimble-rig to-day on the common, were they not indulging the same passion as the most fashionable members of Crookford's?'

Lady Graham's own thoughts were companions she never trusted for an hour, if it were possible by any manœuvre to avoid them; yet she wearied to death of what appeared, in her very private estimation, an exceedingly uninteresting discussion. She felt, in so rural a scene, as out of place as a canary-bird among sparrows; and while Mrs. Grey hurried off to spend one of those pleasant, over-worked, and over-busy days which leave a store of pleasing recollections behind, her guest, in a state of frigid nothingness, stretched herself listlessly on a sofa, with Ditto sleeping at her feet, pulled her rings off and on her fingers, and tried to interest herself in the most immoral and absurd of all Eugene Sue's novels, till, from mere vacuity of mind, she nearly fell into a doze. As the Admiral passed out of the room with his newspaper, he good-humoredly said: 'Emily, you and your dog would make your fortunes in a country where people get half-a-crown a day for sleeping.'

One day Peter laughingly observed, how remarkable it was that, during the whole past week, let the subject of conversation be at starting what it might,

the discussion invariably converged to one point at last, namely, a conjectural dissertation on Lord Edenthorpe's supposed customs, habits, and manners, his impenetrable shyness, his apathetic lethargy, his Spanish complexion, his foreign education, and the unqualified splendor of his house, 'which seems as shy as himself,' added Peter, 'for there is no approaching it! Suppose we all try an expedition to-day, like Puss-in-boots, to invade the fortifications round Giant Castle! I shall be happy to lead the forlorn hope.'

'I trust all your hopes are not forlorn, Peter; but this is by no means the first you have led in the face of a real enemy!' observed Harry, taking his arm; 'and they say, every officer who has once known the excitement of leading a forlorn hope, feels anything else quite tame and uninteresting, till he can repeat the experiment: so, come on! We'll all mount the breach together!'

Between jest and earnest, it was agreed among the juvenile party to venture within the gates of Oakhampton immediately, and to take a distant observation of the castle. It promised to have all the charm of contrast, as Admiral Grey assured them, to anything they had ever seen in the world in general, or at Rockingham in particular, being the perfection of stagnant melancholy magnificence: 'Some of the gates having been left wide open, probably by mistake, ever since the funeral, I wandered in one day, but, oh! what a scene of gloomy grandeur!'

'You are not, then, for an exchange, Admiral, receiving the difference?' asked Peter, giving a satisfied glance round the gay sunny little sitting-

room. 'I never valued wealth a groat, and mere splendor still less.'

'If I ever envied people for being rich,' said Charlotte, 'I never yet envied any one for the use he made of his wealth. People seem so little to know the real art of happiness, by getting it reflected from those they benefit.'

'Oakhampton Castle resembles the work of some gloomy magician,' continued Peter, 'but Rockingham is like the gay freak of a good-humored fairy.'

'Yes!' drawled Lady Graham, condescendingly attempting to do the rural in conversation, 'the grass here looks so green to-day!'

'What color are you accustomed to see it, Emily?' asked the Admiral dryly; 'blue, perhaps, or crimson.'

It was from a scene of cheerful beauty and enjoyment at Rockingham that the juvenile party resolved to proceed on what they felt to be a perilous enterprise, in search of the picturesque, by invading the hitherto impregnable fortifications around Lord Edenthorpe's noble park and grounds.

No formidable apparition, however, appeared at Oakhampton, for a loud cawing of the rooks alone welcomed the joyous party as they reached the large iron gates, crowned with a coronet and decorated with the family arms, which had, ever since the funeral, stood preternaturally open. The numerous tickets threatening prosecution against intruders had now most unaccountably vanished, and the whole place appeared as accessible as an American prairie, and quite as deserted, for there was the stillness of a painted landscape more than of living nature in the

almost primæval forests. The old castle looked to the gay intruders like a phantom of gloom and grandeur, and there was a melancholy magnificence in the whole scene which struck them with awe, while nothing in the extensive precincts seemed to be either covetable or desirable.

Growing bold with impunity, though the very air seemed oppressed with gloomy grandeur, the enterprising party did not long continue to cower behind the gate-posts and trees; but by little and little ventured almost within the shadow of the ancient castle, gazing with animated wonder and tasteful admiration at so noble a structure, which was indeed an architectural prodigy. The pointed turrets, the cumbrously ornamented windows, and the buttressed walls, half wasted away by the teeth of time, presented to their gratified sight an impressive, but almost spectral, monument of other ages. To Charlotte's cultivated mind Oakhampton offered an object of profound and increasing reverence, while the longer she gazed on its venerable turrets, shaded by the tall columns of trees which cast their verdant canopy around, the more delighted she became.

The beautiful decorations of a fine building have been compared to 'frozen music'; and Charlotte, as she gazed at the massy pile before her, surrounded by the gigantic trunks of an hundred ancient oaks, felt the sort of elevated sensation that might have been produced on her mind by the sound of a trumpet.

'You look as intently at this huge old feudal castle as if you intended to purchase it, Charlotte, or to rent the house for a season! A nice little snuggerly

it would be,' said Captain Grey, admiringly. 'Well! of all the houses I have ever seen, this is No. 1.'

'Of course, Peter!' replied Laura; 'no one can deny that it is altogether splendiferous; but can there be real actual life there? We may complain, as Haji Baba did when he landed in England: "No one appeared to say, 'You are welcome!'" Oh! for a sound to break the frightful death-like silence! It makes my ears ache. Those great cedars look like the plumes of a hearse, and the house wants only a hatchment to complete its cheerfulness. Positively, Harry! I dare no more cough aloud here, or speak above my breath, than if we were in a haunted room in the dark.'

'If that peacock would only take the liberty to scream, it might be some relief!' muttered Harry, in an under-tone. 'We seem to have left every human sound as much as if we had all ascended from the earth in a balloon. That castle really looks like some great Mystery of Udolpho.'

'I am told,' continued Peter, in an awful whisper, 'that not a bell ever rings within those walls, not a door slams, not a poker is ever used, and even the very mice never scratch on the wainscot; the wind never whistles among the trees, the millions of birds around never presume to sing, and the boughs never groan in the blast.'

'How completely out of its element that butterfly looks in such a magnified place,' added Laura, entering into the jest with a kind of muffled laughter, which spread amidst the whole group. The spirit of adventure becoming yet more developed among the

merry party, Peter succeeded in drawing them step by step onwards yet nearer to the draw-bridge and entrance of the castle. Charlotte and Laura at length, with one accord, came to a full stop on perceiving that their enthusiasm had led them up almost to the ivy-mantled walls, though Harry and Peter still insisted on advancing, saying there really was no time to be shy now and frightened. The stone-terrace in front was raised several steps, and was framed in by a screen of light stone-work, perforated into beautiful antique designs. There massy vases and graceful statues were sprinkled picturesquely around, and shutters of dark oak seemed to close up every window.

‘One would guess you had never seen a house before, Charlotte,’ said Captain Grey, continuing to advance; ‘you are evidently trying to out-ecstasy us all; but come a little nearer. What I like is real dignity of aspect like this, with none of the modern gilt-gingerbread style of architecture.’

‘Stop, stop, Peter! This will never do! You are drawing us on till we could almost throw our visiting-cards in at the window,’ cried Laura, hurriedly, taking his arm and beginning to retreat. ‘There are limits to my courage, though there seem none to yours. I really almost thought a head appeared this moment at one of the drawing-room windows!’

‘Yes, Laura! I observed it, with an earl’s coronet on! Very alarming indeed! Well! the worst that Lord Edenthorpe could do to such intruders, after all, would be to put us in the pound as a flock of strayed geese. Come what may, however, we have not broken into a dwelling-house!’

‘But there is no saying what I might have been tempted to do, had opportunity served,’ said Harry; ‘for let me tell you, Peter, that Blue Beard’s wife was not more curious to inspect the mysterious closet than I am to see all the long-locked-up wonders of that grey old château—Castle Gloom, the monument of older and, of course, better times.’

‘It certainly has a grand La Trappish sort of air; but one might learn, after surviving a month or two here, to fancy that cheerfulness really was only a popular delusion. I am afraid Lord Edenthorpe must long ago have reached that unpleasant conviction. To do everybody justice, he certainly has the oldest trees and the oldest pedigree in our county; and these are two things that cannot be bought with Fortunatus’s purse. He may be lazy, but he has taken the trouble of being born to a very good estate, which saves him every other trouble. There is only one thing on earth that I really envy Lord Edenthorpe.’

‘What is that, Peter?’ said Laura, with a sly smile; ‘I see you are waiting to be asked!’

‘It is that, by showing you the old castle, he could, at this moment, bestow a pleasure on you, Laura, which I would die any day to do,’ replied he, in a tone so unlike his usual careless nonchalance that Laura started, blushed very deeply, and then, with a slight laugh said to her brother, ‘Harry, pray call off this person, with a telescope in his hand, who has talked to me so long. He is growing tiresome.’

‘How sorry you would be now if I really were to go, Laura! Just to punish you, I have a great mind to be off. You would not, I daresay, take my arm if I offered it now?’

‘Of course not!’ replied Laura, accepting it with a smile. ‘But why do you talk nonsense, Peter, when the thermometer stands at eighty in the shade,’ added she, drawing her straw bonnet forward so as to conceal her face, and arranging her blue cashmere with rather more coquettish grace than common. ‘Some people, as they put on a shooting dress for going on the moors, think it equally necessary to put on a romantic tone if they attempt rural life; but it is not a line of character that would suit you at all, Peter.’

‘On the contrary, you never were more mistaken. If there were a balcony anywhere within a hundred miles, you should see how admirably I could act Romeo to your Juliet. If the grass were not rather wet, I could kneel down here, and give you that scene between King Richard and Lady Anne to perfection. Sentiment is my *forte*.’

‘Wait, then, till we meet in a gondola at Venice, or in moonlight on the Adriatic; but here you might as well talk sentiment in a hackney-coach. A gravel walk like this would be rather an undignified place to kneel upon.’

‘I would much rather be happy than dignified, any day: and have I not as good a right to be miserable and love-lorn as Lord Byron? Indeed, I was reckoned very like him at Genoa.’

‘You might as well attempt to be six feet high as to be romantic,’ said Laura, trying to look friendly and indifferent: ‘it is not what you were born to.’

‘But I may die so,’ replied Captain Grey, laughing and coloring. ‘Dante was in love at nine years old; Byron at ten; and I, who began at eleven—less fickle than they—have been constant ever since.’

CHAPTER XI

‘However we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and infirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won
Than woman’s are.’
SHAKESPEARE.

LAURA had nearly finished a beautiful sketch of Oakhampton when the principal door of entrance was unexpectedly thrown open, and a servant in deep mourning hurriedly advanced towards the ambuscade where the party were all endeavoring to keep out of sight. On observing him approach, Charlotte and Laura, in their consternation, felt that if the earth would only open to swallow them up it would be the greatest relief; and they shrunk back behind the gentlemen, while Ditto, who had been entrusted to them for a little exercise, barked, unconscious of intrusion, as if he were watch-dog in ordinary to the whole neighborhood.

‘Ah, here comes an official on the Preventive Service!’ exclaimed Peter, laughing, in a tone of mischievous glee. ‘As Bob Acres said, “We won’t run, shall we?” Now for a quick and most unceremonious expulsion. The old Lord used to set man-traps and spring-guns up to the very lodge.’

‘We did wrong, very wrong indeed, to intrude in this way,’ whispered Laura; ‘when we all know

how Lord Edenthorpe hates to see any one; and in a time of such affliction too.'

'We must apologise that I brought you, and that you brought me. Trust Peter Grey, Laura, to screen you, and to defend you to the very last drop of his blood. If it rained footmen out of all the doors and windows I should face them boldly in such a cause. Now, Laura, as you are evidently, in serious earnest, annoyed, let me go and pacify this Minister of the Home Department. You will never repent of trusting me—no one ever did.'

'Peter, you are the sort of man who may be trusted with anything but a joke.'

'Trust me with what is a million of times more precious than I can express—an opportunity to oblige you, Laura. I would sacrifice my——my best joke to do so. Now here comes the enemy in full sail, and armed *cap-à-pie*; but if you are not grateful afterwards for my courage in advancing to meet the enemy, then, as Falstaff says, "You may kill the next Percy yourself."'

'He steps over the grass like a dancing-master,' whispered Laura, with a laugh of mingled mirth and consternation. 'The man's whole features are screwed into such an expression of habitual respect that he is the perfect beau-ideal of a great man's factotum.'

'He probably plays the part assigned him, like the anatomical chess-player, and has not an idea of his own beyond his silk stockings and his pot of porter at the second table. The poor man looks as if he dared not presume to turn round his head without being ordered. But here is the moment of moments; and now for our audience.'

The dreaded ambassador, with powdered head, and with legs that looked as if borrowed from the balustrade, at last reached the spot where they stood; and—to the utter amazement of the whole party—hat in hand, most civilly inquired whether they had any desire to see the house and pictures, as he was quite ready to conduct them through the rooms.

‘But, Peter, do ask whether his master would have no objection?’ whispered Laura, hanging resolutely back. ‘I should be more enchanted to go than any child to see a puppet-show; but it might be so very awkward if——’

‘Oh! never mind any ifs! Let us enjoy the good so unexpectedly thrust upon us, and ask no unnecessary questions. Lord Edenthorpe is probably a hundred miles off—yes! by the way, I was told yesterday that he had set out in a balloon and pair for the moon. If he were at home we never should have received such an offer—so it is now or never!’

‘Yes;’ added Harry, impatiently advancing towards the castle. ‘This very civil man has probably lived in some show-house formerly, and knows his business. There cannot be a better perquisite than to look after lions lionising a great house, and we must make it well worth his while to run such a risk on this occasion.’

‘Yes, Harry! as far as half a sovereign goes, I can be the most generous of men,’ said Peter; ‘and this unexpected cicerone seems quite a *cordón bleu* in his department—as happy to see us as if he were the waiter of a well-kept hotel.’

It was not without considerable perturbation that

Laura and Charlotte, with a strange mixture of triumph and terror, heard their own light footsteps echoing along the marble hall, and on the tessellated pavement leading into Oakhampton Castle. There, with searching and intelligent eyes, they mutually pointed out, in low whispers, the objects that most attracted their admiration—the lofty-domed ceiling, the stained glass windows, the variegated lights, the sculptured mantel-piece, the coats of armor, the blazoned heraldry, the polished and very slippery oak floors, and the antique fire-arms shining on the walls where they were arranged with military precision, undisturbed since the battle of Culloden. All around, however, was as cold, vault-like, and silent, as a church on a week-day. Every bleak, dreary, and ceremonious-looking room in the countless succession through which they were marshalled, became, for the moment, enlivened by their presence; but was, before they entered and after they vanished, as silent as a catacomb.

‘Peter, some of those distinguished-looking portraits had the honor, I think, of being your progenitors, but they do not give you a very smiling welcome. Let me introduce you to your ancestors,’ said Laura, leading him forward; ‘look at this dear old thing with the multitudinous curls, for she is your very image.’

‘Yes, to a hair! This has really been a most wondering promenade of ours. All on the tiptoe of ceremony and curiosity; but how I should detest being so terribly rich and great! This is all too grand and mournful for me. The word “gloomy” must have been invented in this house! That state bed, with its velvet hangings and feathered canopy, wants only six horses

to be a hearse ; and the undertaker must have been in his most melancholy mood when he furnished it.'

'Now, Peter ! you are dying of envy !'

'Not guilty, upon my honor ! No, Laura ! Though I am within thirty of the succession to Oakhampton, you may really believe me, that I would much rather hang up my hammock in a seventy-four, or live like any mouse in a cupboard, than be monarch of all I survey—unless——, unless the most beautiful princess that I ever saw or can imagine, shared my throne.'

'Now you are talking trash again,' replied Laura in a tone of good-humored caprice : 'wherever we go, here or elsewhere, you are still Peter Grey, putting forth a most lavish allowance of nonsense ; but do be serious in this awful house ! Let us get rapidly through whatever remains to be seen, for I am in momentary apprehension of Lord Edenthorpe returning home and detecting us here.'

'There he is ! lurking behind the tapestry,' whispered Harry with a subdued laugh : 'he is alarmed at the unusual sound of a human voice.'

'Our friend the cicerone will get his dismissal as soon as we depart,' added Peter lugubriously ; 'what could tempt the good man to such an exploit as admitting us ? He looks like a footman in his senses, and yet here we all are, within the astonished walls of Oakhampton Castle.'

'How much I prefer too large a party in a small house, rather than too small a party in a great cave like this,' observed Laura ; 'everything seems here but cheerfulness. How sad the faded old portraits look of those who once inhabited these rooms !'

'I wonder whether they were all as silent in their day as the present peer,' said Peter, in a tone of solemn euriosity. 'He should be framed and hung up at once beside them! If I had to walk every day through this long line of dismal and gentleman-like ancestors, what a sobriety of demeanor it would bring on!'

'Then it is a pity you do not,' replied Laura, smiling; 'what favor you would grow into with Lady Graham if you became so sedate and aristocratic in manner. *A propos!* where is Ditto? Do look after him, Peter, or we had better never go home again.'

'If you trust Ditto to me, Laura, I shall borrow a sack, and drop him into the river!'

'I could better spare a better dog, Peter! No, no! You shall not treat poor Ditto like a Turkish sultana. Take care what you say too, before him, as Lady Graham protests he can understand every word about himself.'

Charlotte, hearing Ditto loudly barking, ran into a distant room after the noisy little animal, earnestly admonishing him to be quiet. In a scene of such intense stillness the bark of a dog pealed through the very house, and made Charlotte feel conscious, more than ever, that she and the whole party were taking a liberty in entering so solemn and magnificent an abode, always hitherto unapproachable to the eye of gossiping observation.

Miss Grey had hastily pursued Ditto into the middle of a large room before she became aware that it was one into which the cicerone had not ushered her party, and that Ditto was barking, as if he would

tear him in pieces, at a gentleman dressed in the deepest mourning, with a melancholy, mild, and most intelligent expression, who sat in the wide embrasure of a large window. He had evidently been looking out upon the fine old terrace, by which her party had entered, as if he were watching for something in which he felt an interest, while the table before him was strewn with papers, books, prints, sketches, flowers, and even music-books. All the resources were there of a well-stored but solitary mind; and a book, which the stranger held listlessly in his hand, suddenly dropped at his feet, as, with a start of surprise and confusion, he observed the entrance of Miss Grey.

Charlotte never had been so thoroughly abashed in her life. She paused and colored deeply; but, having advanced so far in pursuit of Ditto, as to be almost close to the stranger, it instantly occurred to her that it would scarcely be polite to hurry away without one word of apology for so unwarrantable an intrusion, and during some moments she stood irresolute, the color mounting in deeper and deeper tints to her very forehead. It needed no master of the ceremonies to tell Charlotte that the apparition before her must be Lord Edenthorpe; a cloud of dark hair, black as midnight, covered his forehead, beneath which his eyes, for an instant, beamed on her like stars, and were instantly cast to the ground as if they never were to be raised again.

Charlotte hesitated, and, for a moment, she lingered. Many very young ladies like herself would have giggled and rushed away, while most would have

silently retreated, feeling quite as panic-struck as the young peer himself; but Charlotte never acted on the momentary impulse of her own inclinations, without first considering the feelings of others.

‘Excuse me, my Lord!’ said Charlotte, in a low voice, gentle and amiable as the mind it represented, ‘this intrusion was quite accidental—I would not for worlds have annoyed you, but that vexatious dog——’

At this very moment the incorrigible Ditto was in the act of successfully performing a trick, which Sir Fitzroy had so perfectly taught him that many a culprit at the Old Bailey could not have excelled him. He had secretly got upon the chair behind Lord Edenthorpe and adroitly abstracted a silk handkerchief from his lordship’s pocket, with which he triumphantly rushed away, as proud of his achievement as a soldier on capturing the colors of a regiment.

When Charlotte became aware of her canine companion’s rather discreditable exploit, she made a convulsive, but perfectly unsuccessful, effort to restrain a smile and was turning hurriedly away, when she perceived that Lord Edenthorpe had also observed the trick so cleverly played him. For an instant he forgot to be shy and looked up. Their eyes met, while in his there was an expression of comic surprise, amusement, and still of extreme diffidence. In all her life Charlotte never had, she thought, beheld so beautiful a smile as, for a moment, irradiated his whole countenance. It was a rainbow on a cloud, or sunshine after thunder, lasting but one short instant and then dying away into a look of profound melancholy. It left upon Charlotte’s mind an im-

pression of great interest, but she lost not a moment more in relieving her embarrassed host from her unexpected presence; therefore, catching up Ditto in her arms, and placing the stolen handkerchief on the table, she said in her own soft melodious tone, 'Let me thank you, my Lord—as I most sincerely do—for the great enjoyment we have all had to-day in seeing your beautiful house and grounds.'

Charlotte observed that Lord Edenthorpe moved his lips in reply, but she could not be positive that he spoke or that he did not speak. If she had been put upon oath, she could scarcely have given a perfectly decided opinion either way; but a moment before she did not suppose it possible that his color could have been deepened or his confusion increased, as they evidently were. Charlotte with an almost imperceptible curtsy and an almost inaudible 'Good morning, my Lord!' now hastily retreated, leaving Lord Edenthorpe—as she caught a last glimpse of him—looking more awkward and more agitated than she had ever supposed any one could possibly be.

When Charlotte rejoined her party, they had become almost tired of rambling through a house full of speechless portraits, mute books, and uninhabited apartments; therefore Peter's first proposition to retreat was carried by acclamation, and he bounded along the terrace and over the balustrade, enchanted to escape.

No sooner was Charlotte beyond the possibility of being overheard, than she gave an animated narrative of her own particular adventure to the listening and wondering party, who were all greatly amused, while resting their weariness on a sunny bank overhanging

the river, and enjoying the deep serenity of a summer afternoon.

‘Now, as I have been a perfect Columbus,’ said Peter, ‘in leading you all on to the discovery of a new world, and you, Charlotte Grey, have outdone us all in studying the habits, manners, opinions, religion, and customs of the people, do, pray, give the public here an enlightened account of the native specimen you so unexpectedly caught—Lord Edenthorpe. Is he a talkative man?’

‘Most loquacious! He expressed the highest opinion of my brother the Captain, and a great desire to become intimate with so distinguished an officer!’

‘Is he what is called in Oxford “a fast man?”’

‘Very! he is a perfect young Rapid!’

‘Is he a learned man? Is he a courageous man? Is he a well principled man? Is he an extravagant man? Is he an entertaining man? Is he, in short, as Mrs. Crabtree gracefully expresses it, “a man quite by himself?”’

‘Yes, Peter,’ answered Charlotte, becoming suddenly serious, ‘in every sense of the word he is “by himself.” I never saw any one that looked more intensely solitary than Lord Edenthorpe alone in that Brobdignagian castle!’

‘What a very long word, Charlotte!—fit only to be used on a holiday, when you have plenty of time to waste. As for your high opinion of Lord Edenthorpe, remember that the easiest way of deceiving others is to begin by deceiving yourself; therefore you have reached the first stage as his champion. One advantage of marrying Lord Edenthorpe might be

that you could never come to words; or, if you did, you would be sure of the last word; so what do you say to accepting him, Charlotte?’

‘That I have no right speculatively to refuse or accept a man who never will make me an offer. There is nothing I have less patience with, Peter, than those Misses, like the Clevelands and Dawsons, who go about protesting that they would refuse, or have refused, every gentleman they know. It is a wanton breach of the confidence of society which ought to be put down.’

‘By act of Parliament!’ added Peter, gravely.

‘And,’ continued Charlotte, laughing, ‘if I always see as much in Lord Edenthorpe to like as I did to-day, let me tell you that few persons have so pleasing a smile; and altogether he really is the handsomest man I ever saw. His complexion is dark and clear, like a cup of strong tea before the cream and sugar are put in, and his eyes and hair are the blackest I ever was in company with. As for more essential points, the deponent saith not; but his splendidly melancholy countenance and his magnificent place both amount to the sublime as well as to the beautiful.’

‘Yes! the house is like a gilded cage, very grand and dull; but I would much rather see you as poor as winter, Charlotte, than shut up here like an oyster in a lobster’s shell. How very soon, at Oakhampton, one would rejoice in the recommendation a gentleman once mentioned in the advertisement of his country house, which he was anxious to sell: “It has one peculiarity, that the inhabitants can at any time set out from it to any part of the habitable globe!”’

CHAPTER XII.

‘Round her she made an atmosphere of life,
The very air seemed brighter from her eyes;
They were so soft, so beautiful, and rife
With all we can imagine of the skies.’ BYRON.

LADY GRAHAM, when informed that Ditto had actually, in his ignorance, barked at the Lord of Edenthorpe!—had courageously attacked the young peer in his own fortress, and had thus been the first of the family to begin any intercourse—seemed in a state of endless excitement and curiosity. The story, as told and retold, with unweariable humor, by Peter, became so irresistibly ludicrous, with all the additions which grew upon it, that Lady Graham, descending from her usual dignified indifference to all his habitual nonsense, actually forgot to detest him, and Mrs. Grey suspended her hemming in a paroxysm of laughter.

‘It is so unlike dearest Ditto to attack Lord Edenthorpe, for, in general, he is very aristocratic and discriminating,’ observed Lady Graham, almost inarticulate with laughter. ‘I have seen him bark vehemently at beggars, always; or even if Lady Glentilt calls in a shabbier cloak than usual, he attacks her directly. But do tell me again about his interview with my cousin, Lord Edenthorpe, and all they said

to each other. How dare he attack my relations? Oh, fie!’

‘*A propos*, Lady Graham,’ continued Peter, with a daring laugh, ‘Lord Edenthorpe desired Charlotte to say that if you could spare Ditto on a visit to him as long as you remain, which I am sure we shall all feel most happy to do, it would be very obliging.’

‘I never set up for an obliging person,’ replied Lady Graham, dryly; ‘it is the most troublesome of all virtues to practise, because the more you do for people, the more they expect; until, at last, really neither your purse, your time, nor your head are your own.’

‘No, nor even your dog!’ added Peter, assuming a sympathetic tone of indignation; but, seeing the look of mingled delight and horror with which Mrs. Grey wound her worsteds, and listened to his rallying tone with Lady Graham, the young Captain could not control an irresistible burst of laughter.

‘Peter!’ said Lady Graham peevishly, ‘you really make the very window-panes rattle with such an immoderate laugh. It is quite *fortissimo*! Allow me to beg you will have compassion on my nerves, and laugh lower.’

‘I am happy to think there is something, then, that I have it in my power to refuse you,’ answered Captain Grey, in a tone of extreme politeness, and with a demure look of constrained fun peculiar to himself. ‘Mine is “the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind”; and I am in that sort of humor at present, Lady Graham, that if I attempted to obey you I should be instantly in hysterics. Perhaps a

good comfortable fit of hysterics, however, might rather do me good!’

‘It remains to be seen what my young relative, Lord Edenthorpe, may become, now that his leading-strings are off,’ observed Lady Graham, in a tone pompous enough to suit a German countess. ‘The interest which I naturally take in him as a relation——’

‘Second cousin, or cousin-in-law twice removed,’ whispered Captain Grey to Charlotte, as she proceeded to pour out the tea. ‘How strange it is that the distant cousins of great people always have their heads turned by the importance of their high connexions more than those who have the rank themselves.’

‘What witty people wits are, Peter!’ said Lady Graham, looking suspiciously on at his aside to Charlotte; ‘but pray let there be none of your jests on me and my connexions. Some of your witticisms are scarcely good enough for an old comedy; and, in former times, they used to be chiefly of a practical kind—the only jokes to which your genius was then equal.’

‘I’ll trouble you for a gratifying remark,’ observed Peter, demurely, and with an almost imperceptible twinkle of his eye to Charlotte. ‘Pray indulge me with flattering falsehoods rather than disagreeable truths. Perhaps, Lady Graham, you would recommend a relapse into my former style of exploits for your special amusement! Do you recollect that day when——’

‘Peter!’ interrupted Charlotte, seeing a dark cloud lowering on the brow of Lady Graham, who maintained a passionate silence, at the recollection of obsolete grievances; ‘practical jokes are no jokes.’

‘There you see, Lady Graham, that I am not to expect Charlotte’s coöperation; but remember I owe you one.’

‘Very well, Captain Grey.’

‘Captain Grey! does that mean me? I do not know myself! I am annihilated! I am driven a hundred miles distant at one fell swoop! My hair will grow grey in a night if you cease to be cousinly, and if you forget my Christian name! How very much Ditto has improved lately in the tone and expression of his barking!’ observed Peter, gravely. ‘There is so much good sense in it now! Lord Edenthorpe was much struck with that, and is particularly anxious that my mother’s invitation to himself may transpire while you and Ditto are here.’

‘I am sure my Admiral is, in general, as hospitable as an Arab,’ said Mrs. Grey, with good-humored fretfulness; ‘and this is an acquaintance we ought to begin——’

‘And to carry on as far as it will go,’ added the Admiral facetiously. ‘This is surely a very eccentric and inconvenient whim you have all taken of attempting to entice here that shadow which flits about in this neighborhood, and calls itself Lord Edenthorpe! He positively is an exemplification how nearly human life may be brought to resemble that of mere animals. They also eat, walk, and sleep; but never speak, nor form intimacies, nor——’

‘Nor spend any money!’ continued Peter, with a disapproving shake of the head. ‘Certainly, Admiral, as you luminously remark—or, at least, were about to remark—all men are not men!’

‘I must again request, Peter, that you will not be so outrageously witty at the expense of my relations. It is a sort of target-practice I do not approve of,’ said Lady Graham, speaking very slow and distinctly; ‘a joke is a joke, but this is rather too much for friendship!’

‘Are we friends? I thought we were only cousins!’ replied Captain Grey, in his most fascinating manner; ‘that accounts for Ditto looking uneasy in his mind, since I have risen in favor so rapidly.’

Lord Edenthorpe, in consequence of a cordial invitation from the Admiral, next day, soon after luncheon, added himself to the family circle at Rockingham. There the whole party cordially exercised their utmost tact, and used their warmest endeavors to put him at ease, to make him feel welcome and at home, but without the slightest apparent success. When Admiral Grey had signally failed, and Sir Edward suffered a total defeat, Lady Graham volunteered into the forlorn hope, and attempted, but in vain, to patronise the Earl of Edenthorpe into terms of cousinly intimacy with herself. His long dark eye-lashes hung like a cloud over his eyes, which were not once raised from the ground, while he preserved an almost unbroken silence. Mrs. Grey next exhibited extraordinary ingenuity in contriving questions to ask him, and in imagining suitable observations to make; but all in vain, for she might as well have thrown pebbles into a mill-pond. Every advance that any one made to conversation was extinguished at once, by a reply in the shortest of monosyllables, booming forth, as Peter said, like minute-guns in distress, and without

one answering look, or the least approximation, apparently, to any socialising intentions.

Peter assumed for the occasion what he called his full-dress manners, and, with a tone of gentleman-like and deferential politeness, did the honors of his father's fireside by making some slight conversational remarks upon the beauties of Oakhampton, the fine pictures, and the excellent preserves; but Lord Edenthorpe, of all his preserves, seemed the most intent on preserving his silence, and shrunk from every attempt of every individual to render him comfortable in their society. Peter pointed out some family pictures on the wall; but his visitor scarcely raised his eyes for an instant to glance at them. He then mentioned a fine view of Oakhampton being visible from the drawing-room window; but Lord Edenthorpe no more attempted to move than if his feet had struck root in the hearth-rug; and when Captain Grey obligingly brought him a portfolio of views taken in the neighborhood of Madrid, his mother's native country, Lord Edenthorpe seemed to fix his eyes on the one laid open before him, but never attempted to turn over the page; while nothing could be a greater contrast than the graceful freedom of Peter's animated figure, and the immovable rigidity of Lord Edenthorpe. Both were singularly handsome—but how different!

At length the whole party scattered themselves about the room in various degrees of perplexity; but all had too much good feeling and good taste even to look their astonishment. A dropping fire was in the meantime kept up of such remarks as any one had

the audacity to attempt, though it became increasingly difficult to contrive anything likely to interest or draw out the silent stranger, with his lips so mutely sealed. His marvellously handsome countenance, pale as chiselled marble, seemed almost equally immovable; and Peter inwardly wished the newly-arrived visitor could, in sober earnest, be turned into a statue, as his features were quite sufficiently classical for the gallery at Florence.

‘How lively he is! but how carefully he keeps himself to himself! Is he the Grand Inquisitor from Spain?’ whispered Peter, following Charlotte to a distant corner of the drawing-room, where she had been sent to find a bird which the Admiral had remembered to have been shot in former days by his old cotemporary the late Lord Edenthorpe. ‘Did you ever see such a gentleman-like nobody? That deceased black-cock has more animation than our friend here. Has he the presumption to call himself a man? He is fit only to be a chimney-pièce ornament. If our visitor would only pass his fingers through that cloud of black hair, it would prove that he is alive. I wonder, Charlotte, how often Lord Edenthorpe has counted the bars of that grate!’

‘Pray speak more piano, Peter, or pianissimo. Do not lash yourself into a useless rage. I am in momentary terror lest you should make Lord Edenthorpe a target at which to level the arrows of your wit. You often enjoy going to the extreme verge of safety; and it would not be the best plan, on this occasion, for putting Lord Edenthorpe at ease with us.’

‘He seems scarcely worth the trouble of laughing at; but really, Charlotte, such a man should live under a tub. Here have I done the talking for two,

on very reasonable terms, for an hour, bearing the whole expense of the conversation; and what is my return? The ticking of this ormolu clock has been my only answer. That really will not pay. It was a shame of you, Charlotte, to impose upon our unsophisticated minds by that splendidly embellished description of him at Oakhampton. You almost persuaded me to expect some symptoms of existence, but I find Lord Edenthorpe as dull and impenetrable as the great wall of China. At the same time there is something odd, new, and inscrutable about him. Do you think he does it on purpose?’

‘Probably he prefers the society of his own thoughts to us; but talking is evidently not his *forte*.’

‘He has no *forte*: his plan of life is like the Frenchman’s, who said, “Let me see nothing, hear nothing, and know nothing.” Pride and shyness are inseparably united; therefore if I become fully convinced that our friend has come here to look down upon us all, then, as we say in the navy, I shall take it out of him.’

‘My dear Peter, look at Lord Edenthorpe, and ask yourself whether he is proud. If even Ditto looks at him, he colors up to the eyes. A man can no more help being shy than he could help having red hair or losing a leg.’

‘But the pride is said always to be in exact proportion to the shyness, especially in one who is almost a Spaniard. I am more than half convinced that he would be the better for a good set down, which I should most gladly administer,’ continued Peter, in a tone of virtuous indignation, while energetically

arranging and disarranging the books: 'his father, you know, was as proud as Henry the Eighth; and if that be the son's case here, I shall soon take the starch out of his cambric.'

'Peter, take no liberties now that Lord Edenthorpe is here, and do avoid any unreasonable laughter. Divert everybody's attention from him at present, Peter, as it might intimidate any one to see such a constellation of eyes round him. It is evident that Lord Edenthorpe would rather be flayed alive than spoken to, so give us some of your nautical nonsense.'

'Oh, for a ship! my kingdom for a ship! The real reason why I make myself so disagreeable to all my friends at home is in hopes they will grow desperate, and use all means to get me afloat.'

'You might, surely, with the Admiral's interest, find employment easily enough in that profession, of which you condescend to be the ornament,' said Lady Graham, carelessly. 'To-morrow, if you applied in earnest for a frigate.'

'I might as well apply for the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mitre! No, Lady Graham; I would accept a command in the flying Dutchman rather than remain idle; but every one has grown jealous of my preëminent merit, and even I, Peter Grey, cannot struggle against impossibilities. As my mother says, or would say, "If I cry for the moon I must cry for ever."'

'You generally attribute very new and original remarks to me, Peter,' answered Mrs. Grey, smiling. 'But I fear that during the next five years you might as well have no profession whatever, for anything you will find to do. It is a pity; as employment

to an officer is like taking a picture out of the lumber-room, and hanging it up to be observed, and, perhaps, admired.'

'I have only two wishes upon earth; but, both on sea and on land, all are shipwrecked! There is but one thing I would prefer to commanding a seventy-four——'

'Commanding a wife, perhaps?' interrupted Lady Graham, with a sneer. 'But, like all sailors, you would soon consider the ship No. 1 and the wife No. 2. Be sure, when you are about wishing that, she has a good Californian fortune; for I never saw a naval man yet who could be made to understand that every luxury and comfort on shore is not to be had gratis. You all talk of guineas as if they were halfpence: and, after being accustomed to no other luxuries than salt-beef, ship-biscuits, and tarpauling, you think nothing good enough!'

'The pickpockets would all starve if nobody carried more in their purse than I do!' said Captain Grey, laughingly tossing his own in the air and catching it.

Meanwhile Lord Edenthorpe had seated himself, almost out of sight, at a writing table; and, whether he was writing or not writing, no one in the room thought it well bred to ascertain by approaching his quiet retreat; but certain it is that he glanced, unseen, over a letter addressed to himself, 'On Her Majesty's Service,' and that he wrote a short reply, directed to Downing Street, which he surreptitiously dropped into the letter-box beside him, and then continued for some time to stare the newspaper out of countenance, without evidently reading a line, though, whether he listened to the conversation that followed no one

could guess; while Lady Graham, with a bitter glance at Laura, continued her attack upon Peter. 'I always warn all young ladies who will be warned, Peter, against any poor half-pay marriages! I declined a dozen of them myself. I could not for any man, however fascinating, endure a life-time of dark gloves and roast-mutton. Only in poetry does it sound very charming to read of a cottage filled with roses and earwigs, a donkey-cart, a boat, and a swan—all so romantic. Very few girls care now to soar above the clouds with only high-flown romance to feather their wings. The time for choosing true love and brown sugar is over now.'

'Lady Graham, there is a sort of death-rattle in your eloquence to-day which perfectly annihilates me,' replied Peter in a melodramatic tone. 'Must I believe that there is no young lady created who, in a fit of romantic enthusiasm, would, for my sake, sacrifice the privilege of having her bonnet made by Madame Celestine? The gratitude of a life-time would be too short in return for such magnanimity. Will no one ever share some gimcrack of a cottage with me—all plaister and green paint, the garden filled with daffodils, and every window flaring with the trash people call flowers. I have seen no young ladies for years except the mermaids combing their hair in the Persian Gulf; but surely there must be some girls of the old school in Great Britain, who would rather have a cottage on the earth than a castle in the air, and even prefer a common wall-flower growing in a tea-pot to an imaginary green-house. Perhaps it might be just possible to find such a paragon who

will accept me ; and, if so, I now mentally throw myself at her feet in a rapture of gratitude.'

'Peter, who would ever take you on any terms ?' said Lady Graham affectedly. 'Pray do not refer the young lady to me for advice, unless she likes a chamelion diet on air, and to talk congenial nonsense by the hour. A fine harum-scarum establishment yours would be.'

'You are actually both killing and exterminating me, Lady Graham !' exclaimed Peter, holding up his arm defensively. 'You have no pity on a romantic man like me. I once swallowed an entire circulating library, and have ever since planned to become the hero of a romance in the Minerva press school, full of dimpled smiles, insinuating looks, low sighs, and broken, incoherent explanations, the whole story turning upon some secret being kept that should have been told, and which everybody might have known.'

'There are no heroines upon your pattern now, Peter,' said Charlotte ; 'who would consent to live like Paul and Virginia, knowing the hours by the shadows of the trees, and counting the years by their growth ! I often benevolently wish that everybody had £10,000 a year ; but till then you must remain, like King John, a member of the Lackland family ; you could not stand the scrutiny of uncles and guardians when that misery of romantic life, the settlements, came to be discussed.'

'Ah ! to be sure, I could as easily settle Buckingham Palace on my widow as any other house. Though I share the common lot of humanity, Lady Graham, in always wishing for a little more than falls to my lot ; yet give me love in a cheerful home ;

and, whether cottage or palace, if the love be true and lasting, that is all I ask. The mere temperate zone as to income would perfectly suffice for me; and I should then become quite a family man, living contentedly on perfect felicity, brown bread, and the most romantic economy. Poor in means, but rich in happiness,

“I’ve often wished that I had clear
For life two hundred pounds a year.”

‘But pray what fortunate young lady can be deserving to share in such prosperity and to inspire such exalted sentiments, as well as such undying constancy?’ asked Lady Graham satirically, though without quite directing her eye at Laura. ‘I remember reading of a giant, long ago, who dined upon wind-mills; and you would have to raise the wind as he did. I suppose a balloon is the only equipage you could offer the fortunate individual. I really have an old prejudice in favor of a little matter-of-fact money.’

‘Money? Ah! I forgot! There is such a thing as money! I never am vulgar enough to recollect that. I am, in general, so far above mercenary considerations that, if a purse lay at my feet, I should scarcely stoop to pick it up: but you are now trying to teach me quite a despicable love of gold, Lady Graham. I shall really, if you talk in this way much longer, do something base or shabby to provide myself and my imaginary bride with a competent income.’

‘You should settle at the Cape, Peter, where I remember your once mentioning that, when you did not choose to buy a thing, the people always gave it you for nothing,’ said Charlotte.

‘Or suppose, Lady Graham, you get up a charity bazaar on my behalf, under distinguished patronage, and raffle me off—20,000 tickets, at one guinea each!’

‘A guinea, Peter! it is to be hoped no young lady will ask me whether I think you cheap at a shilling. I should like to buy you at my valuation, and sell you at your own.’

‘Luckily, no girl, on that subject, would consider your opinion worth a filip! We cousins, it is well known, always thought each other *laide à faire peur*,’ answered Peter, conceitedly, and with a not very dissatisfied glance at the opposite mirror; ‘but I pique myself on my ugliness. It is the only thing remarkable about me.’

‘Mr. M’Arthur tells me,’ interposed Laura, ‘that, in all his travels, he never met a plain woman, though once he saw one that was “but middling.” It would have been a real treat to see her! Madame de Sevigné speaks of the privilege which men enjoy of being ugly; and, Peter, I once saw a man actually uglier than you!’

‘Impossible! But, Laura, now that I am grown older, the first bloom of my ugliness has rather gone off, which is unlucky.’

‘Do not be afraid of that, Peter; you always were your own greatest flatterer,’ said Lady Graham; ‘and that is the most dangerous of all flattery.’

‘You find it so? Well; there is no wisdom like experience! It is a great comfort for us both, Lady Graham, to be always sure of one flatterer at least, and a very blind one, too,’ said Peter, laughingly, walking off. He then approached the table where Lord Edenthorpe was seated, saying, ‘You see, my

Lord, how Lady Graham treats her cousins! Your turn will come next. It is a sad bore—as you will find—to have relations; they do take such liberties, and must be put up with!’

Lord Edenthorpe’s handsome young countenance became drenched with blushes: he looked straight at the fire, as if reading his fortune in the coals, and became awkward to the very tips of his fingers. He made no attempt to answer, but dropped the newspaper from his hand with a nervous start, and bent his head until nothing was visible but his night-black hair. Peter waited politely for a minute or two, expecting that perhaps all this tumult might form itself into words, and at last elicit a reply; but he waited in vain. With a clandestine elevation of the eyebrows, an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, and an indicatory jerk of his head towards their singular guest, intended for Charlotte only, Peter then slowly departed. His sister immediately afterwards perceived the large, dark, and most expressive eyes of Lord Edenthorpe suddenly raised, and for a moment fixed on her vanishing brother, with a glance which seemed to her full of the brightest intelligence, and beaming with intellect and sensibility; but Peter, unconscious of any change, left the room, humming these words in an almost inaudible key:

“As I walk by myself,
I talk to myself,
And myself says to me:
Look after yourself,
And take care of yourself,
For nobody cares for thee!”

CHAPTER XIII.

‘How small of all that human hearts endure
The part that laws or kings can cause or cure!’

DINNER had been ordered; and Lord Edenthorpe again stood near the fire, his large, lustrous eyes fixed on the floor, his face intensely flushed, his black hair almost covering his forehead, and his long arms dangling helplessly down. He shifted his position, uneasily, from one leg to another, clenched his hands, twitched his coat, and finally became as rigid and upright as if modelled in wood; and Peter whispered to Laura, ‘Lord Edenthorpe was, this morning, successfully magnetised, and is now in a perfect state of somnambulism and *clairvoyance*.’

While the kindly-intentioned party around kept up a straggling, desultory chit-chat, they avoided embarrassing him by any particular notice; but Mrs. Grey sat near Lord Edenthorpe in a state of good-humored perplexity, stealing a side-glance at her noble guest occasionally. She at length tried to conciliate him into ease and confidence by cautious approaches, as if enticing a wild deer or an untamed robin to feed out of her hand; while the whole party, with a corresponding interest, slyly watched her successive failures. With eyes, ears, and understanding at Lord

Edenthorpe's entire disposal, Mrs. Grey's persevering cordiality seemed to deserve a more profitable return, as she invested a great deal of time in the enterprise in vain; but, finding that her intended duet was destined to continue a solo, she at last ran completely aground, and concluded by saying, in her usual easy, companionable tone: 'Will you not be seated, my Lord?'

'I never saw so impossible a companion!' exclaimed Peter to Laura, with a look so ludicrously dreary that she could not but laugh. 'Do you think Lord Edenthorpe fancies himself one of the company? He would scarcely venture, if he trod on your dress, to beg your pardon! There is our good pains-taking Charlotte toiling to entertain him, while he would evidently give the world to see a trap-door open at his feet and swallow him up! I wonder that Charlotte perseveres! There! she is at it again!'

Dinner being at length announced, Mrs. Grey rose, and affecting a total unconsciousness of her young guest's agitated embarrassment, she, in a matter-of-course way, took his arm, as if he had offered it, and proceeded slowly down stairs, chatting all the way, with cheerful animation, about the comfort of keeping punctual hours, with illustrative anecdotes of spoiled dinners and irritated cooks. Taking it for granted that Lord Edenthorpe would interest himself in any subject, Mrs. Grey ran on with easy volubility, but he still continued as wordless as before. If Lord Edenthorpe had been ascending to the scaffold, instead of descending to dinner, he could scarcely have testified more nervous disturbance of mind.

Among the juvenile cousins, a merry dialogue round

the dinner-table ensued, sparkling like the champagne in their glasses, and the peals of laughter which occasionally rung round the table were echoed and caricatured in every note of the gamut by a favorite parrot, educated under Peter's especial auspices, during his last voyage, and brought home as an offering to Laura.

'I wish you and your parrot were less noisy, Peter!' said the Admiral, smiling to see Lady Graham affectedly putting her fingers to her ears. 'If Poll continues to enjoy your jokes so much, she really must leave the room.'

'Poor Poll! in her present companionable, chatty mood, she is a great acquisition to our society! She would deserve to be turned out much more for being too quiet! What are human beings and parrots made for but to talk, laugh, and be merry?'

'I have seen parrots who could sometimes speak quite as well as their masters, or better,' added Lady Graham, looking full at Peter. 'I heard Poll screeching out, yesterday, "Horrid bore!" and it was just after you left the room.'

'Very probable, as you were remaining! Poll is an immense acquisition whenever conversation flags, and it has been rather at a premium in this house lately. Nothing bores my ear like silence, though I believe some people are of opinion with the Irishman, who remarked that nothing spoils society so much as conversation.'

Mrs. Grey slightly coughed, and having stolen a warning glance to Peter, she hastily asked Lord Edenthorpe to take a slice of turkey; but it was in vain that she tried to pull the check-string on her son's volubility. 'This tongue will go well with

the turkey, my Lord! I remember when we were children, my mother in helping us to a slice of one, used to say, with a look of the most impressive morality, "This is a tongue that never told a lie!" The reward of truthfulness, in that instance, never seemed to me very obvious. May I have the honor to take wine with you, my Lord? Champagne?"

Lord Edenthorpe's reply, if any, was inaudible, but M'Arthur, at a signal from Captain Grey, filled both glasses; after which the young peer seemed to take wine with his plate, as he bowed at it, and sipped a single drop of the Admiral's forty-year-old sherry, without apparently knowing or caring whether it were wine, brandy, or toast and water.

'A much better pet than a parrot is a dormouse, which all the ladies in London have a perfect rage for at present,' continued Lady Graham, stroking Ditto, who remained all dinner-time on her knee, to the manifest advantage of her satin dress, and who managed occasionally to steal a greasy morsel off her plate; 'they are the sweetest little harmless, quiet creatures in a house.'

'Quiet enough, I dare say,' whispered Peter, aside, stealing a lugubrious glance towards his apparently unconscious guest: 'I wonder how ladies can lavish all their ecstasies of affection on such lethargic half-alive animals, who give them not the smallest return of amusement or pleasure for all their pains.'

Mrs. Grey coughed again, fidgetted in her seat, and succeeded, for an instant, in catching Peter's eye; but he looked unconscious of any delinquency, and persevered in gravely listening to Lady Graham, while

she seemed bent upon showing off before her titled relative, however slight the encouragement he gave to her claims upon his notice, or to any immediate intercourse.

‘Seeing dear kind Lady Gentilt, when we took leave, was inconsolable at losing my society, I promised to send her, as my substitute, from London, if it can be got, a particularly fascinating dormouse.’

‘Unluckily the dormouse season is nearly over in London: but perhaps in this neighborhood it might be just possible still to find one,’ muttered Captain Grey, avoiding his mother’s eye, and with a look of the most perfect inadvertence. ‘If not, your best plan will be to send Lady Glentilt an empty cage, telling her that the little wretch has died on the journey.’

‘How very conscientious! I’ll trouble you, Peter, for a piece of good advice! Your morality resembles that of the valet in the play, who said the worst of uttering a falsehood is, that we must tell twenty more in its support, because it hurt his conscience to be found out. Poor Lady Glentilt! she shall not be so imposed upon.’

‘Then send her a stuffed one!’ replied Peter. ‘There are some creatures that really should breathe hard to prove that they are in existence, as they seem to need only stuffing to fit them for a glass case.’

‘Peter,’ whispered Charlotte, earnestly, ‘do not carry your wit as a schoolboy carries his gun—careless who may be wounded, provided only he is himself amused. You will refrain, I am sure, if it be merely possible that you may hurt our silent guest’s feelings.’

‘If that worthy phlegmatic youth, duller than a door-post, has any, which I should like, as a curious

question in natural history, to ascertain,' answered Peter.

When the gentlemen at length rose, Admiral Grey frankly and kindly grasped hold of Lord Edenthorpe's arm to help him up stairs; and if at that moment he or any one else had accidentally looked at the young peer, which no one did, they would have seen one of those rare and beautiful smiles light up that noble young countenance, which were not merely angelic for being few and far between, but because they expressed a degree of intellect and sensibility almost unsurpassable. When the Admiral dropped his young supporter's arm, in the drawing room, with good-humored thanks for so timely an aid, Lord Edenthorpe leaned his head upon his hands at the chimney-piece, and assumed his usual attitude of helplessness, indescribable dejection.

'Lord Edenthorpe certainly sees some imaginary party going on in his boot, for he never takes his eye off it,' whispered Peter to Charlotte. 'When do you expect that he will start his first idea! He really is almost unliveable with, Charlotte! Only think! I entertained him with all my grievances about being unemployed, and might as well have confided my sorrows to a milestone. All the time I spoke he looked with a most determined aspect into the coal scuttle. Do you think a little electricity or galvanism would do any good in this really disastrous case?'

'Nothing will do but considerate kindness and unobtrusive sympathy, Peter. Try that system of treatment for a few days, and, if I have any skill, the success shall exceed your own hopes.'

CHAPTER XIV

‘When shall we three meet again?’

SHAKSPERE.

CAPTAIN GREY at breakfast next morning, when concluding a humorous panegyric on his sister, said, ‘Even in the making of tea, that grand test of management, memory, foresight, and patience, Charlotte displays a remarkable genius! My ninth cup, like the ninth wave, is always the strongest, and she duly remembers everybody’s whim—who takes no sugar, and who dislikes cream; who prefers it weak, and who enjoys it strong; with all the additional embarrassments of half-cups or whole-cups, and a distinct recollection for those who have forgotten whether it is their first cup or their second. When I make tea it shall be all mixed in the urn with cream and sugar, so that no caprice can be attended to, but all must take it like their soup at dinner, neat as imported from the kitchen.’

‘Do not promulgate such arbitrary intentions, Peter, or you will add materially to the difficulty of getting you off our hands, as no lady would submit to any interference with the prerogatives of the tea-pot,’ said Lady Graham. ‘I do not think that even an

advertisement in the "Morning Post" would discover a lady of "suitable age and fortune" who will submit to such terms. I refused a gentleman once, merely because he objected to Ditto having the cream-jug after we were done breakfast at Ardverkie. I positively would not have another word to say to him !'

'Lucky man !' said Peter, laughing. 'By the way, I perfectly recollect now hearing how, on that very day, a gentleman at Ardverkie was discovered hanging, in a fit of despondency, on the bell-rope after breakfast, and that you were brought in guilty of manslaughter.'

The breakfast circle were about to disperse, when Horner, the Admiral's butler, brought in a brown paper parcel, evidently containing books, which Admiral Grey immediately began to open, saying in a droll tone of fretful good-humor: 'It is very strange who this portable library can come from! I never set up for being literary, but my friends send me their books now as regularly as they used to send me their visiting cards! One would think this was Stationers' Hall! Every acquaintance I possess has penned either a pamphlet or a novel! There! I told you so!—"From the Author!"—but who is he? or she?—"Fortitude and Heroism," the third edition! a novel in three volumes! Well! I've no objection to read it on the first rainy day, and to see what our anonymous friend has got to say. It shall be ordered, like a parliamentary petition, to "lie on the table."'

Charlotte buried her face over a jar of flowers to conceal a laugh and a blush, while Peter watched

her with a very peculiar smile, and then stole a glance round the table.

‘Novels are the great vehiele of all public discussion now,’ observed Sir Edward. ‘If any man has new ideas on politics, religion, or political economy, which he wishes to promulgate, Bentley has immediately three volumes from his pen “in the press, and speedily to be published.” I have fallen into that trap several times lately, and when I wanted to pass an idle tell-me-a-story hour, find myself poring over a magnified treatise on the poor laws, or a controversial refutation of Popery.’

“Fortitude and Heroism!” — why, Peter! you must surely be the hero, for the title would be so perfectly appropriate,’ said Lady Graham, hastily seizing the first volume, with which she evidently meditated an immediate flight to her room. ‘How glad I am to get this book at last. Nothing else has been talked of or written about for some weeks; and, as an old book is no better than an old newspaper, I was impatient to secure a reading before the first bloom is off its popularity.’

‘My parrot mentioned in confidence to me, three months ago, when this book first blazed out upon the world, that I ought to read it,’ said Peter, ‘which accordingly I did——’

‘And felt greatly disappointed, of course,’ interrupted Charlotte, hurriedly. ‘It is a great loss in modern fictions that we always know who everybody is. I used to think it such a diverting variety now and then formerly to meet with a real hero, who had been found in a basket.’

‘My first novel shall be in very high life. “The Duke of Haut Ton, supposed to be written by a nobleman of rank,” full of silver-fork-isms. I shall employ M. Ude to describe the dinners, and Madame Devi to do the dresses, that they may be quite correct; also a turnkey from Newgate, to supply me with interesting criminals,’ said Peter, beginning diligently to cut up the pages of a volume damp from the press. ‘The story of this “Fortitude and Heroism” really is one to murder sleep! It is exquisitely charming! The heroine, Lady Hermione de Lancy, falls desperately, but of course quite disinterestedly, in love with the rich and extravagant Duke of——’

‘Stop him! stop him!’ exclaimed Lady Graham, eagerly, as she escaped rapidly, volume in hand, to the door, sweeping off also to-day’s ‘Morning Post,’ the last number of ‘Punch,’ and the ‘Court Journal.’ ‘If I hear a word of the story it will be entirely ruined. Now stop him, Admiral! He is following me with that mischievous look to betray the whole mystery. If you do not call off Peter he will finish the *dénoûement* before I can get out of the room. Pray arrest your son for high treason against the author and me!’

Lady Graham, after locking her door, without delay arranged herself into the most luxurious of attitudes, full length, on a sofa before the fire, enjoying in anticipation the delight of two hours’ uninterrupted novelising, till the important era of luncheon; but her paradise of indolence was unexpectedly disturbed by a sudden and very energetic knock at the door. Hastily rising, she opened it, and found Horner

standing respectfully there to deliver a message, with the melancholy importance of which he was evidently much impressed, and spoke in a suitable tone of mournful regret, saying, 'If you please, my lady, Captain Grey desired me to inform your ladyship that he has just received accounts of a very sad accident; Lady Hermione de Lancey has been killed by a fall from her horse, the day before she should have married the Duke of Wolverton.'

'How dare you bring me such a message!' exclaimed Lady Graham, looking angrily at the astonished butler, who thought her senses had been affected by the shock. 'Tell Captain Grey that I am seriously displeased with him for informing me of this. I did not choose to hear it. Say that I consider he has behaved extremely ill to me.'

Lady Graham slammed the door violently in Horner's astonished face, who retired, wondering much what there could be to irritate the most irritable of human beings in so truly melancholy an event as the death of a young lady so highly connected the very day before her wedding. He moralised much, while cleaning the silver tea-urn, upon the total unfeelingness prevalent among people of fashion, and also wished he could ascertain whether the Duke of Wolverton allowed wine at the second table, what were the perquisites of the under-butler, and how much a day was given for white gloves and bouquets.

'Pray, my Lord!' said Mrs. Grey, the only person who had not yet given up experimentalising on Lord Edenthorpe's loquacity, 'did you ever hear of this paragon book that they are all so ridiculous

about? I see it is already in a third edition, and three thousand copies sold in two months; so it must even now have averaged about twenty thousand readers. What a responsibility for any author to have occupied so many hours of so many people!’

A deepening color was the only evidence Lord Edenthorpe gave of having heard Mrs. Grey speak at all; he raised his flashing eyes for an instant as if to answer, and moved his lips for once, but quite inaudibly.

‘The style is matchless!’ observed Sir Edward, who always spoke most in Lady Graham’s absence, ‘I picked up a volume one day at the new club, and it made me forget for the rest of that day to eat, drink, or sleep. In its pages all that I had ever felt, thought, dreamed, or suffered, is described; and there are passages of pathos, as well as scenes of humor, which I never saw equalled. It would keep the most phlegmatic reader in a perfect tragi-comedy of crying and laughing.’

‘Who can the author be that sent it here? I must be rising into notice, somehow, in the literary world! Does any one suspect that I write criticisms in the “Quarterly Review”?’ exclaimed the Admiral, puffing his cheeks with a look of comical importance, and pompously returning his spectacles into their case. ‘Peter! fine feelings and profound emotions are so completely in your line, that you probably threw it off your pen in the intervals of study at the Naval College.’

‘Not exactly, Admiral. I wrote romances long ago; but I cannot do it now, and never did! Let me bet you ten to one that no person in this room can guess the author of that novel, and that I shall,’

said Peter, with a glance of comic malice at his sister, who returned him a very discouraging frown. 'Charlotte! why do you look so like the Red Lion at Doncaster? I have told **nothing**, but your eyes have a whole library of intelligence in them; and I am sure either you or I will let it all out soon. You seem to be making me all the signs in the zodiac to-day! It is a perfect pantomime to witness your dumb language! Gentlemen and ladies, I do know a little trifling secret about this never-to-be-sufficiently-admired book; but I must positively keep it, for there is an electric telegraph at work to forbid my revealing the mystery.'

'It will not be a secret long,' interposed Mrs. Grey, looking up from her hemming. 'You have a generosity of nature, Peter, that can keep nothing to yourself, and least of all a secret. Out with it at once; for out the mystery will come, sooner or later. Any one might as well attempt to put a lid upon the top of Mount Vesuvius as to make you keep a secret that is burning to explode.'

'No, mother. Your eyes are looking through me, and have almost nailed me to the wall; but it shall not transpire. Whether with a man of sense or a man of nonsense, let a sense of honor always be uppermost. You may laugh, Charlotte—anybody can laugh! but I keep a promise inimitably. There is one person, however, that you know—not a hundred miles off—who could unlock the strong-box of my mind, and——'

'Not a strong box, Peter, but a bottle of ginger-pop, fizzing before the fire,' observed Charlotte,

laughing and coloring. 'The wire of secretiveness cannot hold you down a minute longer, I see.'

'How very malicious you are, Charlotte! As a punishment to you, I have half a mind to speak out. The author is not Bulwer, nor James, nor Dickens, nor even myself. At the same time, Admiral,' added Peter, with a long, inquisitive glance at his father, 'would you be so angry as to cut me off with a bad shilling if I had clandestinely put pen to paper, and entertained the world with "Heroism and Fortitude?"'

'No, Peter! I should be too proud if son or daughter of mine could do themselves so much credit! but none in this house are likely to draw the pen out of the scabbard, or to be distinguished in that line. I am no porcupine at the quill myself, and used formerly to be more afraid of an author than of a ghost: but times are changed now. I see no great harm in the new fashion of everybody thinking it as much a matter of course to write a book as it used to be to write a letter. If any of the present company choose to compose as this author has done, I am ready to put on the spectacles of criticism, and to clap the hands of approbation, at so felicitous an experiment.'

A pause ensued—a very long pause. Peter looked earnestly at his sister with an expression of extreme kindness, while Charlotte's color went and came in the most rapid fluctuations. For several minutes she remained, with a thoughtful downcast air, in apparently deep perplexity; after which, looking suddenly up, she glanced round the room, and felt surprised to perceive that Lord Edenthorpe was secretly gazing at her with the most intense interest. His large,

deep, speaking eyes looked deeper and darker than ever, and became instantly shrouded under his long eyelashes; but not before she had seen the smile that glittered there, and played for a moment round his beautifully-formed mouth. That earnest look and beaming smile long haunted her memory, afterwards, with a pleasant association; but now the impression seemed, in the multitude of her thoughts to be but transient; for it in no degree caused the burning glow which rose to her cheek, and the flutter which agitated her heart.

Charlotte had at length taken a resolution, and rose from her seat, while Peter encouraged her with a smiling nod, which expressed the most rapturous delight. She then advanced slowly to the Admiral, who observed with astonishment the trembling emotion of her manner, when, taking his hand, she said in a tone of agitated pleasure, 'It will be a weight off my mind if you are pleased, my dear father! That book is mine; but, till now, I did not dare to tell you so. It seemed unpardonably presumptuous in me to appear before the world in print; but Peter is really the worst culprit, and now turns Queen's evidence! He transacted the whole publishing part of the business, and would take no denial when he suggested the experiment. It was all his fault.'

'Every author blames the importunity of friends, Charlotte. You will find that apology in the preface to all books printed during the last twenty years; but I need no excuse,' answered the Admiral, smiling with fond affection at his daughter. 'My dear girl, I am a very proud father, and a very happy one. There is no

concealing, on this occasion, my supreme felicity! I congratulate myself as much as I congratulate you, my best and dearest of daughters!’

Mrs. Grey, who had kept her seat, apparently panic-struck at this unlooked-for announcement of Charlotte’s, now rose, and embraced her with every demonstration of affection, exclaiming, ‘Well! I must say ——’ But she could say nothing; for, overcome with emotion, the most affectionate of mothers shed tears of pleasure, while the young authoress now experienced the greatest of all earthly pleasures—that of being praised, and even judiciously praised, by those who possessed and who deserved her deepest affections. Amidst the storm of exclamations, questions, laughter, and jests, which ensued in the happy circle, Charlotte once again happened to look at Lord Edenthorpe, when she perceived that he was contemplating the whole scene with an expression of so much sympathy and kindness, that, had he spoken to her for an hour, she could not have felt more assured of the intelligent interest he took in all that passed: but, the next moment, his dark, speaking eyes were closed with a sigh, and his handsome countenance again assumed its usual imperturbable aspect, as if he belonged to nobody.

‘The Admiral intends immediately to present you with a pair of blue stockings, Charlotte, and one of the new patent India-rubber pens which rub out all that should not be written,’ said Peter. ‘If our honored parents are proud of you now, they will be ten times more so after reading your rather cleverish, not very dull, novel. There are three degrees of excellence in books—those that are worth borrowing, those that are

worth buying, and this, that would really be worth stealing. It contains none of the sentimental twaddle which I hate, embellished with "oh! ah! and alas!" nor any people either supernaturally bad or insipidly good. Human nature has been unlucky in its portrait-painters, lately, making all the worst features so prominent, that one is ashamed of belonging to a world of such low cunning, vulgar slang, meanness, and vice; but yours is a story to elevate the mind—to subdue the affections—to—to—but I am never happy in attempting the sublime; only it strikes me as being a capital good hit.'

At luncheon, the subject of Charlotte's authorship was again renewed; while Peter observed that her astonished parents seemed to look upon her as a sort of natural curiosity, fit only to be among the lions in the Zoological Gardens.

'My dear girl, if I had known that you were born with a pen behind your ear, instead of a silver spoon in your mouth, I should have stood in awe of my own child, even in her long frock and coral necklace,' exclaimed the Admiral, putting on his spectacles; 'but one gets used to anything. In Lady Sale's journal she makes an entry which proves what habit can do in familiarising one with the most alarming phenomena—"Earthquakes as usual to day!" When I was young, rather more than a hundred years ago, an authoress running tame about the house would have been as terrifying and uncommon to me as to feel an earthquake; but I shall get used to you in time.'

'Charlotte never was and never will be in the knock-me-down-with-cleverness line,' replied Peter, in a tone of brotherly kindness. 'But to judge from her acquire-

ments, she must be ninety-nine years old at least. She has certainly been studying during all the last century to learn so much as she knows, and is at the same time above all affectation, either in hiding or displaying her acquirements.'

'Charlotte,' added Laura, 'you might be cut down into six very accomplished young ladies, with your music, painting, languages ——'

'And the use of the globes,' continued Peter, in a tone of supreme animation. 'Charlotte might almost get a situation as day-governess, with a salary of £40. "Wants a place in any nobleman's or gentleman's family, a young lady qualified to teach French, Italian, German, the harp, piano-forte, and guitar; singing, drawing, astronomy, geology, knitting, and authorship. Pupils qualified to be professors at college on the shortest notice." What a mental tight-rope your unfortunate scholars would be stretched on, Charlotte!'

Peter laughed with almost frantic glee at the pleasant *dénoûement* respecting 'Fortitude and Heroism,' as if he had forgotten how to leave off laughing; while Charlotte, whose hand was clasped in that of Mrs. Grey, answered, with a look of almost tearful pleasure, the many questions, relevant or irrelevant, eagerly asked by her kind parents, and frankly replied to.

'Peter, I wish you had such another secret of your own to reveal,' said the Admiral, jesting. 'Suppose you write a dissertation on the character of the Man in the Moon, or perhaps confess yourself the author of this very clever and most enlightened essay on the State of Politics, which I see in our county newspaper to-day. If Junius be still anonymously alive, it is certainly his.'

‘There could scarcely be a more masterly production,’ replied Captain Grey, with much more than usual earnestness; ‘I never, as you know, exaggerate; but, to speak in strict moderation, that short essay contains a blaze of intellect, beside which every other star grows pale. The author actually has made the hair of the public stand on end; and this must be a proud day for the man who penned it. Perhaps,’ added Peter, with that careless grace inseparable from his manner, and giving a sly side-long glance at the Admiral, ‘there may be a trifle too much Toryism; and I am thinking to bring out a new edition of it, with not a single line of the old one left.’

‘Fiddle-stick-ism! Nonsense, Peter! But now, among all our county people, whom can we guess the author to be?’ continued the Admiral, laying his finger on his lip, and looking up at the ceiling, as if he expected to read the name written there. ‘I have called over a muster-roll, in my own mind, of every orator at our road-meetings, or election-dinners, but not one man among them carries a sufficient calibre of intellect to make me honor him by a momentary suspicion.’

At this moment Lord Edenthorpe slowly rose; and, coloring deeply at his own audacity in stirring a finger, and still more in moving a chair, he strolled listlessly out of the room, while no notice was taken by the well-bred circle around of his unexpected and sudden movement; but Peter, with increasing animation, continued the discussion, saying, ‘In my whole most valuable assortment of friends, there does not exist one fit to dot the *i*’s or stroke the *t*’s of that splendid essay. I can

tell you exactly who is not the author, however; it certainly is not our departed friend, Lord Edenthorpe! Indeed! my father's wig block is quite as capable. But, nevertheless, I have a great mind to give out as a positive fact that he has confessed to being the unknown writer.'

'Peter, take the advice of your particularly sensible mother,' said Mrs. Grey, 'and do not, in jest any more than in earnest, take leave of veracity. You would die rather than tell an actual falsehood, and you would shoot any man who said you did; and yet, really, in my old-fashioned way, I am often puzzled with the style of talk in vogue now, when you sail so very near the wind, and trust my discretion to know what is true from what is false.'

'My dear mother, I am the very essence of truth, I ought to lie at the bottom of a well! I never was brought but once, however, to what the Americans call "a dead stare," and that once has been this week, by the utter perplexity of studying our mysterious visitor, Lord Edenthorpe!'

'Of course, Peter,' answered Charlotte, looking up from her drawing, 'with your ideas about the super-felicity of talking, and with your thousand horse-power of speech yourself, any man who says nothing may expect to be pronounced good for nothing; but do not bring in a hasty verdict. For my own part, I think people who talk too little greatly preferable to those who talk too much, and that many more err in the one extreme than in the other.'

'Peter would like to be inflicted,' said Harry, 'with that enchanted bride mentioned in a fairy-tale, who

never stopped speaking, night or day, until her tormented husband became deranged.'

'But Peter himself would do the talking part, till the lady became deranged,' added Charlotte: 'I have it upon good authority that when he spoke interminably once to the old Duchess of Brechin, her Grace at last exclaimed, a moment before she fainted, "Oh, Captain Grey, is there nobody in the room you could speak to but me, for I am quite worn out!"'

'Ah, Charlotte! this is your mode of revenging Lord Edenthorpe's cause upon me! Because you have succeeded in writing an imaginary romance, you seem intending to act a real one. Let me recommend you to elect any hero rather than the dark-eyed inquisitorial-looking Earl of Edenthorpe! In every novel noblemen are only introduced in order to be refused, as the heroine must reject a greater man than she accepts, and in that capacity our new friend might be useful.'

'I have begun life, Peter, as I mentioned, with that excellent rule, which all young ladies might advantageously adopt, never to refuse any man till he proposes.'

'Do you seriously think, Charlotte, that Lord Edenthorpe wears a tongue?'

'Yes, Peter, though for the present it remains in a sheath; and I believe, moreover, that he wears both a heart and understanding, if we could only get at them.'

'They must be under a very strong lock and key!'

'Well, Peter! my serious belief is that, buried beneath that dark, rather gloomy exterior, there exists a mine of undiscovered intellect and feeling. I am the only person in this house never mistaken, and

have caught a glimpse into Lord Edenthorpe's mind, though nobody will believe me !'

'You are the person born to set everything to rights in this wrong-headed world, I dare say, Charlotte; but as I have a special antipathy to people who are always in the right, do pray be in the wrong now for a change. That interesting youth has no more feeling than a band-box ! What a prize he would have been to Goldsmith, who wrote the autobiography of a fish !'

'Look at his changing color, and say so again, Peter ! Every medal displays a reverse, if you only examine it; and trust my opinion that Lord Edenthorpe has quite sensibility enough, perhaps only too much, for his happiness. His silence is not a moody but a very intelligent one; and you do not surely maintain that, unless there be a broad laugh or a burst of tears, people feel no emotion ? There are intermediate degrees, Peter, and there are emotions too deep for either—laughter that kills, and sorrow that dries up our tears. Quiescent as Lord Edenthorpe looks, there is great dignity in his high forehead and fine features. His eye dilates, too, with a flash of intellect almost startling, and even the stillness of his face has more expression sometimes than all the demonstrativeness of others. I detect him watching us all sometimes, Peter, with a look of singular interest and a strange intensity of observation !'

'No ! no ! Charlotte; in Lord Edenthorpe's little pittance of a mind, his chief sorrow evidently is, to have been entrapped here amongst us, and his chief joy will be to get away,' continued Captain Grey, looking very belligerently at his sister, whom it was his whim for the moment to tease: 'our poor dear mother has worn herself to a thread-paper with trying

to enliven him, but she might as well talk to her own rheumatism. No one will ever succeed in taking the muzzle off him. An unsociable, proud——'

'Dear Peter! it is only very common-minded people who attribute every peculiarity of the great to pride!'

'Let it be what you please, then! I read once of a man who sold his shadow, but this favorite of yours is himself a shadow over us all—a perfect blot on the page of our felicity! He is really longer and darker than the shadows of evening at sunset! You have positively detected some aperture in his marble mind,' said Peter, amused beyond measure at the increasing excitement of curiosity respecting their very undemonstrative guest. 'We have both so long set up as judges of character, that this is an admirable opportunity to test our comparative powers. Let Harry and Laura be umpires and bottle-holders while Lord Edenthorpe completes his week here. There is but one way in which we can draw some amusement out of his seven long days' visit, by both narrowly observing his conduct and conversation. Neither of us for our lives must communicate a remark to any one—least of all to each other—and, as soon as Lord Edenthorpe has frowned his last frown in our drawing-room, and bowed his last bow, we shall declare our respective opinions of him to the company present, and put it to the vote whether Charlotte or I have judged his mind aright—whether he has a handful of common-sense or not—whether, in short, he is above or below human nature.'

'Agreed, Peter! but what a gross exaggeration! I merely say that though Lord Edenthorpe has not a popular standing-for-the-county manner, yet he may be better than you guess. You always maintain that I am

of the 'tis-well-it's-no-worse school, and I have an odd notion that nobody is really perfect, not even you, nor me, nor Lord Edenthorpe, and yet we may be all very well in our way. As yet, indeed, my notions about our worthy but mysterious visitor continue almost unarrangeable.'

'Then from henceforth, Charlotte, you must neither by word nor look intimate your thoughts to bias or prejudice our jury! In the end, all shall be fair, open, and above-board, but meanwhile perfectly private in our respective minds, while this pleasant sociable guest remains.'

'To that clause in our compact I am quite agreeable, Peter, because really one lives in constant terror that your looks, words, and inuendoes, might accidentally reach Lord Edenthorpe, giving him more pain than he naturally feels among strangers, and more than you could wish.'

'Never fear! In his company I really feel as uncomfortable as a hali-boiled pea. Not that I should mind a whole flock of Lord Edenthorpes any more than if they were Cheviot sheep, but, unluckily, my mother talks of our family affairs before him, as if he were a marble statue or a wooden doll.'

'It would be more entertaining, certainly, if Lord Edenthorpe allowed his thoughts to take the air occasionally, but they are imprisoned behind a barrier of the finest teeth that ever I saw,' observed Harry. 'If he ever looks at any of us, it is only by contemplating the reflection of our faces in the mahogany table after dinner; but I do not suppose he yet knows one of us by sight.'

CHAPTER XV.

‘Man only is the common foe of man.’

GODWIN.

DURING the next few days, at Rockingham, the domestic conversation continued to assume an increasingly confidential, easy tone; while the young people rallied and jested each other, as usual, with almost ceaseless mirth. Many good-humored family jokes were alluded to; many a playful discussion of science or politics took place; many droll stories against themselves, or each other, were told; and the scene was frequently varied by some sly practical jest of Peter's, which surprised the whole circle into light-hearted paroxysms of laughter. At other times, Harry and Laura's ideas came out into play, with all the cheerful affectionate feelings of their amiable nature; and again Charlotte was drawn on to express those refined sentiments and elevated thoughts which, when enlivened by much of her brother's vivacity, made her one of the most fascinating companions that could be found. Thus, their minds all ranged as free and unfettered as if Lord Edenthorpe had been the pillar of snow that he appeared; and yet, as Peter remarked, their dark La Trappish guest never was a moment absent in body

from the merry circle of Rockingham friends, wherever his invisible mind might be wandering. If any one had observed Lord Edcnthorpe very closely, he might also have become aware that, whenever Charlotte entered the room, even if his back were turned towards the door—though she might steal in almost imperceptibly—he became instantly aware of her presence; for his color always deepened, and his eye became brighter. Perhaps Charlotte partly saw this herself, and felt an additional interest in all that was said while he remained in the room—privately guessing, sometimes, how it pleased or annoyed him, and anxious always to shield him from any of the thousand tortures in society that he seemed so acutely to feel.

The entertainment of the party was varied by pic-nics, reading aloud, riding, walking, boating, and singing of catches and glees. Charlotte also entered with her mother, sometimes, into graver subjects connected with the affections and hopes of this life, as well as with the prospects of an endless futurity. On such occasions, the beautiful voice of Charlotte, harmonised to every expression that could give it interest, became instinct with emotion and with intellectual fire; while even the most heedless became raised in thought, and attained a higher reach of mind, in contemplating all that constitutes the poetry of man's existence on earth, as well as its dignity in reference to a world in prospect.

Often, when the conversation became engrossingly interesting, the silent guest became, if possible, more motionless and inanimate than ever, as if he had even ceased to breathe; and yet the color then occasionally deepened on his cheek. He would furtively raise his

eyes, for an instant, sometimes; and Charlotte was herself astonished how insensibly, and almost unaccountably, her thoughts became occupied with observing him. After every other individual of the party had ceased to remark Lord Edenthorpe's presence or absence any more than that of the fire-screen, or to notice his exits and entrances more than those of the coal-scuttle, Charlotte felt that every subject of conversation interested her more when the speechless young peer was present. As extremes meet, his passive manner and stony silence proceeded, she conjectured, from anything but coldness; and, the very few times that Charlotte had an opportunity to judge, there was an intensity of expression in his voice and look which indicated a depth and power of character unknown to others, and only guessed by herself.

Impressed with the conviction that there was a mine of gold in Lord Edenthorpe's intellect—if it could be, like the Californian mines, discovered and worked—Mrs. Grey and Charlotte often purposely discussed subjects which they thought likely to suit Lord Edenthorpe's taste, or avoided those they thought, possibly, painful; yet their success was still very meagre. As that which costs most trouble is generally most valued, Charlotte felt it an event—for the day, at least—if Lord Edenthorpe's large, brilliant eyes were so much as raised, for a moment, from the ground; but Peter continued impatiently to declare that he was really not worth the space that he occupied in the world.

'It positively does not pay, Charlotte, to be fishing all day for monosyllables. My own are to be had cheap enough, for the asking, at any time; but your friend

seems, in general, so entirely engrossed with the uncertainty whether to sit, stand, or walk, that it really is a charity sometimes to divert the current of his meditations. Do you think it would be a good plan to ask him some of our best conundrums? That would, at least, give him something to think of.'

By degrees, their passive guest had acquired an almost unaccountable influence over the thoughts of both Charlotte and Peter. His slightest movement and most transient expression of countenance became, according to their previous agreement, a subject of secret observation, and afterwards of animated discussion, in the little conclave that sat in judgment on the young peer in their more private hours. The conclusions at which the brother and sister arrived were still so diametrically opposite that they might have been thought to speak of a different individual; for the very little that Lord Edenthorpe either said, did, or looked was so differently interpreted.

Frequently, when Charlotte lifted her eyes from her work or her drawing, and glanced surreptitiously at the dark, immovable stranger, she perceived him gazing earnestly at herself, while an expression of animated interest lighted up his magnificent eyes; and she was ready to exclaim, like the sculptor to the statue, 'Oh, that those lips had motion!' So much did her mind become engrossed by his presence or absence that, at last, Charlotte very sensibly resolved to think about Lord Edenthorpe no more, which was the surest plan to make her think of him constantly; and, accordingly, she did.

The thoughts of Captain Grey were, however, at this time, very suddenly and most unexpectedly diverted

from that channel, as well as from every other, by the arrival one day, immediately after dinner, of the post-bag, bringing in it a large, official-looking letter 'On Her Majesty's Service!' He tore open the envelope with characteristic impatience, and rushed into the contents, which were an announcement—most astonishing and most welcome—that he was appointed to the command of a ship—the *Camperdown*—about to sail immediately, with a squadron, to the Black Sea.

Peter sprang from his seat in a ferment of delighted surprise, and rushed round the table, letter in hand, to his father, proclaiming the intelligence, in accents of breathless pleasure, to the surrounding circle. He joyfully claimed the congratulations of all present, and laughingly shook hands with every individual in company, not even excepting Lord Edenthorpe, whom, in the hurry and confusion of the moment, he grasped heartily by the hand, while Peter almost fancied that a friendly pressure was returned; but his heart and mind were too entirely preoccupied and happy to think of that circumstance a second time, or to care whether it were so or not.

'If the First Lord had put his pen into my hand, saying, "Captain Grey, here is a *carte-blanche*, to give yourself any appointment that suits you best in the navy," this is the very letter I would have written!' exclaimed Peter, admiringly contemplating the contents. 'Yesterday it seemed quite as likely that I should be appointed Lord Mayor of London. Great events always come when least expected, but there certainly has been a wonderful change of wind at the Admiralty since that disastrous letter, only one short week ago,

when his Lordship politely expressed his deep regret at the total impossibility of building a ship on purpose for me! I then considered myself snuffed out of the service for years to come; but now a bright vision appears on my horizon, of the *Camperdown*, 74, on the deck of which I am to achieve my great naval victory, and then retire to domestic felicity, with the Grand Cross of the Bath, and one arm.'

'Keep your arm, Peter, and, when you return, part only with your hand,' replied Admiral Grey, emptying his glass, and not exactly looking at Laura, who seemed intent on cutting up the orange-peel on her plate into various fantastic forms. 'This really is a most unaccountable event. My interest at the Admiralty is not a one-horse power, and after our last refusal, No. 5, I really thought you were floored, Peter, till we had the blessing and advantage of a general war.'

'I am told on private authority that Her Majesty was quite shocked at the idea of my remaining a single year unemployed,' said the newly-appointed Captain, filling a bumper to his own health, and claiming one from all his well-wishers. 'Who would not have pitied an unfortunate sailor, condemned to the unutterable misery on shore of shooting grouse, fishing salmon, tolerating the society of home, loitering quietly to bed at twelve, and dining at seven? Nature could not have stood that much longer, so it was full time for a deserving officer to be rescued from so calamitous a fate.'

'Ask leave of the world before praising yourself, Peter,' interrupted Mrs. Grey, smiling with maternal pride on her handsome, animated son, though at the same time a tear still glittered in her eye 'Certainly,

you have had your own luck to-day, and most wonderful it is. I have often heard a discussion—Which is best for getting on in the world—luck or merit.’

‘Then I have tried merit so long, that now, for variety, give me luck. Really, the more I think of it, the more astonished I am at this extraordinary piece of good fortune, which has descended from the clouds on my unworthy head!’

By chance, at this moment, Charlotte looked suddenly round the table, and she became surprised to observe how unusually heightened was the color on Lord Edenthorpe’s downcast countenance. He seemed evidently laboring under some internal agitation, and the next moment, believing himself unobserved, he hastily stole a glance at Captain Grey’s animated face. During that instant, there beamed on his whole countenance and glittered in his splendid eyes a smile so beautiful, so full of intelligence, so almost angelic in its expression, that Charlotte wished it could have been stamped there for ever. The next moment, like a transient gleam of sunshine, it had vanished.

‘Have none of our family an eye in their heads but me?’ thought Charlotte, wondering to perceive that no one but herself observed that brilliant flash of intellect and feeling. ‘Even my mother has ceased to notice Lord Edenthorpe, and Peter is in such a blaze of felicity that our guest is entirely forgotten. That is, however, the state of affairs he most desires, therefore for the present be it so.’

‘How sadly Harry will miss you!’ said Laura, when Captain Grey again took his seat beside her. ‘I cannot think how he will exist without you.’

‘And nobody will miss me except Harry, you mortifying Laura! But one more or less signifies nothing to you, when

“Friends in all the aged you meet,
And lovers in the young.”’

‘You unreasonable Peter, to expect that, when you are so very glad to go, we only are to be like Lord Ullin, left lamenting,’ replied Laura, with a slight shade of pique, which delighted the young sailor, especially as her voice became low and agitated, when, with an affectation of indifference, she added, ‘It really is, already, as Lady Graham prophesied, “Ship, No. 1; and everybody else, No. 2.”’

‘But,’ added Harry, ‘as the tailor said to the uniform, “Go where glory waits thee!”’

‘Laura,’ whispered Captain Grey, with deep and sudden emotion, ‘your own conscience at this moment upbraids you with injustice to me!—I hope you will be duly punished by it, and brought to repentance, long before I return to learn the one subject on earth most interesting for me to know—whether I have been remembered or forgotten. And, perhaps, even before I go, you may give me a hint whether happiness or misery shall await me on my return.’

As Lord Edenthorpe seemed the only inanimate object in the house, Captain Grey, in a private moment, next day, observed grumblingly to Charlotte, ‘He is really worse than the chairs and tables! They might be pulled about the room, or a footstool kicked out of the way; but one’s visitor, a man of rank and of distinguished position, must be treated with civility, whether he

steals out of the room or steals into it. If I have a weak side on earth, it is a love of hospitality, and yet I cannot help wondering sometimes, in my own very private mind, when our noble but uncommunicative guest will say that one word which I would rather hear from him than from any other person alive—if he is alive. That one word is, according to Lord Byron, “Fare-thee-well! and if for ever, still”—so much the better! I am sure he would neither be much nor justly regretted.’

‘Peter! I could perfectly hate you sometimes, for talking so severely of our inoffensive friend upstairs,’ answered Charlotte, tossing her bouquet energetically down on the table. ‘I would not for worlds add a straw’s weight to the oppression he so evidently labors under; but, though you totally disbelieve my romantic opinion respecting his occasionally bright expression of countenance, yet my only consolation is, that you are still decidedly civil to Lord Edenthorpe, which I hope may last throughout his visit.’

‘Then it must not last much longer, for I am positively tired of being knocked down with a “No,” or a “Yes,” every two hours. It comes booming out, low and deep, like a gong. You can live on a diet of looks and smiles, Charlotte, which nobody sees except yourself, and they never reach me. It is necessary, you think, that somebody should speak up for one who cannot or will not speak up for himself, and the secret of your partiality is, that he does sometimes listen to you yourself as if you dropped diamonds and pearls. One day his very eyes seemed to have ears, I remember now, when you spoke; but

Lord Edenthorpe is every way most unaccountable. Pray, Charlotte, did you ever, in a sociable moment, speak to the church steeple? Since our friend has done this world the honor to enter it, he might as well have ornamented the top of our parish church. You and my kind mother have both been trying so hard to civilise the bear that I begin to think he will very soon dance.'

'At all events, Peter, if we interest ourselves, enliven him, and convict you of being mistaken, that is killing with one stone a whole flight of birds.'

'Of all fools, defend me, Charlotte, from a solemn fool; and your tame peer has been several times lately mistaken for an animated lamp-post.'

'Or a not-animated one!' answered she, smiling, but fixing her large lustrous eyes reproachfully on her brother. 'Time will show, Peter, that one of us is wrong.'

'Perhaps both,' added Harry. 'If I could see any third view to take of Lord Edenthorpe, I should certainly adopt it, merely for argument's sake. With his very black hair and gloomy frown, he looks like a Brigand—a Captain of Banditti! We may all concur, however, in opinion that his tongue is of no use to any one but the owner.'

'I want words myself sometimes now to express my own feelings,' added Captain Grey, aside to Laura, who blushed deeply, but seemed wholly occupied in threading her needle; 'I really begin to repent of having so rashly called up a ship from the vasty deep, and would sink it again if I might but have another wish, far more dear to me, instead. I ought to be

now in a state of professional felicity, but I am utterly miserable at leaving one person, who will not so much as say she is sorry now, or would be sorry if I never returned. I have, as Lady Graham is always saying of herself, "so much feeling and so much imagination," that really your indifference is killing me.'

'Wait till you see the first figure-head of a ship at Portsmouth, Peter, and that will cure all your melancholy,' replied Laura, with a vivid smile, but nevertheless she blushed more deeply than before, for in spite of herself the color mounted to her forehead like mercury in a thermometer. 'Lord Byron, I am told, intended these lines for you, Peter:

"He was a mortal of the careless kind
Who chose to go where'er he had a mind,
And never dreamed a lady was concerned."

'Laura, there is a ceremony in the East that, when an Indian kills the most insignificant animal, he solemnly begs his pardon; and as that last remark of yours has been the death of me, I'll trouble you for an apology,' replied Peter. 'Now I am about to fulfil a promise that I made myself long ago, never again to sail without first asking you——'

What Captain Grey intended to ask, or what the blushing and agitated Laura might have answered, never can be known, as at this moment Lady Graham entered, and giving a glance at them both, of silent anger but awful calmness, she sat down with Ditto on her knee, evidently resolved to be as disagreeable as the circumstances allowed, and that certainly, to judge

from the countenances of those on whom she had intruded, was so in no moderate degree. Captain Grey became resolved, however, not to give his cousin the triumph of enjoying her victory, and putting on an indifferent tone, paid the usual dog-civilities to Ditto, and then said, in his ordinary careless tone, 'When people find, Lady Graham, as you and I do, the whim and caprice of society a bore, it can scarcely be wondered at if they have recourse, like you, to the attachment of animals, who are always the same. Whether we deserve it or not, our dogs always, while memory lasts, esteem and love us!'

'Thank you, Peter, but speak for yourself! I have crowds of human beings who esteem and love me unchangeably. Dear Lord Leamington, whom I hope to meet soon, says he never saw any one so toadied by the world in general as myself. By the way, Laura, he has got you the white poodle that I told you of, and has sent it to be educated at the circus, where it will be taught a hundred droll tricks. To leap through a hoop, and to seem dead whenever you bid him. How charmed you will be!'

'I need no lessons in dying for you, Laura,' whispered Captain Grey, as she passed to leave the room; 'and even the jumping through a hoop, if necessary, I have no objection to practise.'

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CHAPTER XVI.

‘Polite, as all his life in courts had been,
Yet good, as he the world had never seen.’

PETER and Harry were one day equipped for shooting, and at Mrs. Grey’s private request they both, with good humored cordiality, invited Lord Edenthorpe to join them, which, to their considerable surprise, he instantly rose up to do, with an attempt to look pleased, though the shyness so greatly predominated in his expression, that it certainly appeared a painful pleasure, if it were any. Both young men, with perfect politeness and good intentions, made the very best they could of the annoyance, though no doubt it was one, and took unheard-of pains to make the excursion agreeable. They gave him his choice first in a perfect armory of double-barrelled Mantons, and talked perseveringly to each other afterwards about their former achievements on the moors, their pursuit of poachers, their copper-caps, their game-bags, and small-shot. During these discussions they occasionally appealed in a friendly matter-of-course tone to Lord Edenthorpe, who looked as if he would much rather they had shot him, and who continued to display his usual ingenuity by never in his reply exceeding two syllables in a rather foreign accent,

generally followed by what Peter called 'a perfect spasm of shyness.' Gradually the two friends unconsciously adopted that tone of easy good-humored patronage towards their silent companion which is commonly addressed to shy people, and usually covers an infinity of contempt.

After some time the two young sportsmen, coming to a good cover of whins and heather, separated in search of hares. They had hitherto been unfortunate in not obtaining a single shot, and both were very impatient now for the first trophy of success. Peter suddenly observed what he mistook for a hare, and had taken a deliberate aim, when in a moment Lord Edenthorpe, who stood beside him, seemed to stagger forward; and, grasping the very muzzle of the gun, struck it down, and fell himself to the ground. The gun having gone off at the moment, wounded Lord Edenthorpe severely in the thigh, as he fell, drenched in blood, at the feet of Captain Grey, who stood for an instant so utterly bewildered and amazed, that he could scarcely collect his scattered senses sufficiently to take the measures which he very soon did to bind up the wound. Whether Lord Edenthorpe had voluntarily thrown himself before the gun, or stumbled over a stone, he could not guess; but stunned as Peter felt by the sudden shock, he took whatever means were in his power to succor the wounded young nobleman, who bled profusely. A sickly paleness came over Lord Edenthorpe's countenance when Harry arrived at the spot, who looked white as death, and exclaimed, in accents of great agitation—
'Peter! my best of friends, what an escape! Did you not observe that it was I you aimed at, crouching

among the long grass? One instant more and you would have finished me! That shot must certainly have done my business. How infinitely we are both obliged to Lord Eden——. But what is this!—wounded!—fainting! How did it happen? He seems quite insensible!’

‘Lord Edenthorpe, in the most unaccountable manner, staggered up to the very muzzle of the gun, and took hold of it, as if to save himself from falling. It seemed quite accidental on his part.’

‘Well, Peter, accident or no accident, I should have been dead as Bonaparte at this moment, if Lord Edenthorpe had not so fortunately interposed his person. You sailors always carry a gun as recklessly as a monkey does a red-hot poker.’

A shutter is, by a singular coincidence, always close at hand when any accident occurs! This shutter having been on the present occasion forthcoming, as usual, the wounded young nobleman was carefully conveyed on it to Rockingham, where, for some days, his life continued in actual danger, and fears were entertained that at the very least his leg might require to be amputated. Whatever had to be endured, Lord Edenthorpe bore with unflinching fortitude and silent patience; till, at length, to the infinite relief of all around, the feverishness subsided, the wound assumed a more favorable aspect, and Mrs. Grey, his assiduous nurse, after scarcely leaving his bed-side night or day, had the heartfelt gratification of seeing her patient become decidedly better.

Captain Grey, in the meantime, had gone to commission his frigate at Portsmouth; but received, at

his own earnest request, a daily bulletin of Lord Edenthorpe's convalescence; and it was with a feeling of very serious thankfulness that, on his return for a short time before sailing, he found Lord Edenthorpe still progressing favorably, and almost entirely restored.

When Mrs. Grey sat alone with her young patient one evening, and saw him in his easiest of easy chairs, looking quite cool and composed, as if more able for exertion than before, she could no longer resist, in the warmth of her friendly heart, pouring out into the ear of Lord Edenthorpe the whole volume of her thoughts and feelings respecting his accident, to which the fear of exciting him had hitherto forbid all reference. As soon as she began there was an indescribable change of countenance in the young peer which surprised her — a look of repressed interest, of deep emotion, and of intense mental suffering; while Mrs. Grey continued to speak of her astonishment how Peter could have perpetrated such a blunder, her gratitude to Lord Edenthorpe that Harry had been preserved, her perplexity whether he had done it by accident or design, and the deep emotion with which Sir Edward had heard of his son's almost miraculous escape. Mrs. Grey finished by expressing her own grief, and that of all the party, that her young guest had suffered so severely.

Lord Edenthorpe listened with a degree of emotion for which his kind companion was quite unprepared; but his agitation, though excessive, was short, being suppressed as suddenly as it appeared. A deep flush dyed his countenance, which again resumed its marble whiteness, and he closed his eyes, but not a word

escaped from his lips, though she observed that he gave a sigh of intense and most desolate grief. Amazed at the effect of her own words, and afraid, in his present feeble state, to agitate or fatigue the invalid, she concluded by merely adding, 'It was a most frightful escape! You might have been killed, my Lord!'

'So much the better; it would have been in a good cause!' replied Lord Edenthorpe, closing his eyes, and turning away with a look of pallid despondency.

At these words, spoken in a tone of such heartfelt sincerity and depth of feeling, Mrs. Grey felt the tears start into her eyes, and she paused for some moments unable to reply, as well as hoping that Lord Edenthorpe might speak again, but he had relapsed into his usual iron stillness. Not a sound was to be heard now, but a single heavy, half-suppressed sigh, and to any one but Mrs. Grey he might have passed for being asleep.

Mrs. Grey sat beside Lord Edenthorpe's couch pondering, long and deeply, in her secret mind over the short sentence, expressing so much despondency, which he had most unexpectedly uttered. In a tone of characteristic frankness and good humor, she said, with her most gentle accents of friendly remonstrance, though her voice a little shook while making the effort—

'Allow me to tell you, Lord Edenthorpe, that my friends in this house are permitted to be happy in any way they like, without my ever interfering; but the moment any one becomes melancholy, it is one of my perquisites always to know the reason. This is the

case especially when it is a friend to whom I owe a very great obligation, as I do to Lord Edenthorpe. You nearly died to prevent an accident which must have reduced us from being the happiest family on earth to being the most miserable ; and it might cheer any heart, even on the bed of death, to have succeeded as you did. On that occasion you risked a life which might be, in the eye of every one except a parent, more precious than even the one you saved. I trust, however, now, that you shall soon be restored to the full enjoyment of that happiness for which you are by nature and fortune gifted with ample materials. Long may you live to enjoy them.'

'The shorter the better!' replied Lord Edenthorpe, slowly raising himself up, and fixing his large dark eyes on Mrs. Grey, with an expression of most mournful intelligence. 'I can think of death with resignation, but not so of a long life. You are the only person who has broken into my long solitude of feeling. Let my heart, then, for once go into day-light, and be known to one so universally kind. A deep desire has lately arisen in my mind for your sympathy——Yet why not die as I have lived, in silence!'

Mrs. Grey kindly grasped her young patient by the hand, but said not a word while he continued. His eyes were closed as he spoke, and his countenance, pallid at first, and overcast with a death-like sadness, gradually became suffused with color, till at length a bright hectic burned on his cheek, and Lord Edenthorpe turned his eyes towards Mrs. Grey, with a look of beaming intelligence such as she never had seen in any face before, while his words, now that the barrier was

overleaped, seemed to rush from him in a torrent of energetic emotion. His rich, full voice gathered strength as he proceeded, and had in its tone an earnest clearness which went at once to the heart and understanding of his kind and sympathising companion; but she sat silent and still while he hurried on in a voice of desponding resignation that touched her deeply.

‘Early discouragement, stern usage, and cheerless solitude, have crushed and blighted all my powers of social exertion; but who could meet with such single-hearted kindness as yours, and not feel safe from ridicule and misconception? Inured for years to be checked by satirical observations, and all my feelings to be harshly misunderstood by the only person with whom I could associate, I shrink habitually from notice. If my own father felt thus towards me, what can I now expect among strangers? I shrink from ridicule more than from death itself; and yet my foreign accent, as well as the habits and manners imposed upon me by education and circumstances, must inevitably excite it, as even in this house I could not but sometimes perceive. To you, Mrs. Grey, and to you only, I may pour out my mind, for your whole mission on earth seems one of sympathy and kindness. Yes; in your presence, I, who remember with ceaseless regret a mother’s tenderness, often feel the more intensely what it once was to me—what it is to others.’

Mrs. Grey testified the depth of her interest in all that Lord Edenthorpe said by the earnest seriousness of her look and manner, but she avoided any indication of surprise, endeavoring to seem as if it were a thing of every-day to make and to receive such confidences, and

therefore, encouraged by her evident sympathy, Lord Edenthorpe finished by adding, in a low, subdued voice of intense emotion : ‘For the first time, in this cheerful house, new ideas of what life is intended to be have dawned upon my view ; but while others enjoy life, I have been scarcely taught to endure it. My mind has always seemed like a fettered bird, but more so now than ever. All I can do shall be done, however, and has been done, to avoid despair.’

‘You, my Lord ! gifted, as you are, with everything that others are seeking—with youth, health, birth, station, and, as I now perceive, with talents !’

‘Still my life seems a living death. An appalling solitude has, from childhood, surrounded me. In heart and soul I have dragged on my existence alone, and now no tie whatever binds me to human society, for the only relative I have remaining, whom I only saw once, when he volunteered his presence at my father’s funeral, is unworthy of my friendship and would be benefited by my death. I long for such association, friendship, affection, and confidence as others enjoy. These I have read of, and my own heart tells me how inestimably precious they are ; but none exist on earth to whom my interests in life are naturally united, either by near relationship, or by old and intimate friendship. No one that I meet is bound to have a kind thought or a warm affection for me. Such attachments as would satisfy my heart are not to be bought with money, or my whole fortune would be scattered to the winds in exchange. Would not all I could lose be as nothing in comparison of gaining a friend such as I need : to encourage me when I fail,

to rejoice when I succeed, and to seek with me every happiness consistent with religion—to whisper hope amidst grief, cheerfulness in disappointment, perseverance in discouragement, sympathy in good or evil, and cheerfulness even in death? No; such a one I never could deserve! Never!’

To Mrs. Grey’s sound, vigorous, and discerning mind it appeared a perfect hallucination that her young patient should think and feel thus, even crushed as he had long been by the power of habit and education, and she attempted now to speak: but it seemed as if the long pent-up thoughts of Lord Edenthorpe were rushing forth in a flood, almost in spite of himself. As he hurried on with a rapidity of utterance not to be checked, he seemed occasionally thinking aloud, or at other times addressing Mrs. Grey, while his eye became vivid with intelligence, and his chest heaved sometimes as if his bursting heart had asserted its freedom, and would be heard.

‘No one knows me!—no one ever can know me! My unconquerable diffidence renders me a stranger to every human sympathy, and who could care merely to exist? A horse or a dog can live as I live, if life be all. Like a tomb-stone, I carry about my name and age with me, but no more. Mine is not an elastic nature, and nothing that the most satirical observer can say represents me as more strange than I am. Every effort I make to throw off the cloud that habit and education have enveloped me in seems vain. It is but like throwing a stone in the air, that falls on my own head, and crushes me down. My mind resembles a bird with both wings broken, which but quivers its

fractured pinions, but cannot use them. What are the gifts of fortune without the far better gifts of nature?—without mutual affection, without participation, and without sympathy? Could it make me as happy, Mrs. Grey, to squander thousands every hour, as I see you each day, surrounded by the warm affections of home—by the daily, hourly confidence of those you love; knowing all their thoughts, telling all your own, feeling for them, suffering for them, and ready, were it necessary, to die for them, or they for you! Yes; life at its best, in a happy home, is beautiful to behold; but from such blessings I seem hopelessly and for ever divided!’

Again Mrs. Grey was about to speak, but Lord Edenthorpe evidently found it much easier to go on than to be silent, as if he were afraid to stop or to look back upon what he had done in thus opening his mind, though he was apparently resolved to say out all he felt before pausing to consider it over. Turning, therefore, his large magnificent eyes again on Mrs. Grey, with a look of trusting confidence, he earnestly continued—

‘Brought up in silence and solitude, amidst scenes wide and lonely as an American prairie, curbed on all sides, discouraged in every effort, without a friend on the visible earth, or the possibility allowed me of making one, ignorant of the world and its ways, foreign in speech, shy, reserved, and awkward, I am and must ever remain, the subject, among other men, of astonishment, ridicule, and perhaps even of good-humored contempt. In your house I see, for the first time, what are the home-blessings enjoyed by

others—those which I have so often, in my solitary thoughts, imagined; but if I seek such happiness for myself, it is like the desire of the moth for the star. Mrs. Grey! if the witnessing of all your excellence has led me for once to relieve an over-burdened heart by speaking to you, may I beg and entreat that all I have said may be kept entirely to yourself, and that even you will scarcely remember it. There are reasons, not at present to be explained, why, till I leave this house, it would add, if anything can, to my feelings of embarrassment, if only the kind old Admiral were suddenly to alter his manner from becoming aware of this appeal to your sympathy, and of those inward feelings which have never before been uttered to a living mortal.'

'Then, my dear young friend, trust to my sacred promise that your confidence shall be inviolable. I should be in despair if there could be a doubt of that. In revealing your thoughts you have treated me like a mother, and no one ever had cause to repent of doing so,' replied Mrs. Grey, in a voice which testified how deeply she had been touched. 'When I pledge myself, however, not to speak with others of what has passed between us, remember I keep the privilege of talking very frequently to yourself, as I have a great opinion of my own powers, Lord Edenthorpe, and really think I could yet persuade you to feel happy. What could any mother desire for her own son more than you have, if only you possess energy to throw off the crust that habit and education have thrown over your natural gifts?'

'Ah, Mrs. Grey! I can plan and resolve, but when

could I ever execute?' replied Lord Edenthorpe, with passionate emotion. 'My nature in boyhood was not like that of the weeds that flourish most when trampled on, and now it seems to me utterly prostrated. I ventured here, plunging into a society of strangers, that I might fairly try the experiment whether social happiness be yet attainable for me or not; and through every feeling of difficulty I have remained; but the trial has utterly failed. The more I see what others are, the more I also observe what is wanting in myself; and the more I mix in society, the more solitary I am: for there can be no greater misery than to feel an ardent desire to make yourself beloved, and a total impossibility of doing so. When I see all the kind affections of this happy home—when I hear the ringing laugh and lively dialogue around me, in all of which I can have no part—when I listen to the easy interchange of sentiments and feelings, the quick observation, the sparkling intellect, and fluent language of your domestic circle, I long to relieve you all of my presence, and once more to bury myself where my feelings are lost in the solitude of my own heart and home.'

'That shows, my dear young friend, how the thinnest hair casts its shadow over a sensitive spirit left too much alone like yours. Everything must have a beginning; but I believe there can be no greater trial of any one's social powers than to plunge at once into a family circle like ours, living together in an electric atmosphere of intimate associations and old familiar jokes. It silences the most habitual talker. Only remain a little longer and you will become one of us. Nothing that the most considerate attention can do

shall be wanting, as my young people, when you gradually become known to them for what you are, Lord Edenthorpe, would become every day more attached to you.'

'Not more than to one of those family pictures on the wall! No, Mrs. Grey! I can confide in you, but my instinctive shrinking from others is now incurable. I cannot forget in a day the habit and the sufferings of years,' replied Lord Edenthorpe, while the shadow of pain returned to his countenance. 'Through their well-bred efforts to be kind, should I not secretly trace, in the bright-eyed, happy circles around you, a feeling of half good-natured ridicule, or of secret annoyance?' One of your family, and one only, has inherited from you that considerate kindness of nature which I could implicitly trust. The consciousness of her excellence,' added he, lowering his voice until it became almost inaudible, 'has only added a pang of deeper sorrow to my heart, of a nature which I expected to pass through life without ever knowing. With a heart formed for all the tenderest affections of life, it is buried beneath such an iceberg of apparent indifference that I can look for no return.'

'But a few more such efforts as you made in coming here, Lord Edenthorpe, would place you on a level with—or, rather, far above—ordinary society. Only show yourself to others as you have done this day to me, and you would feel yourself drawn out irresistibly to take a part in what you have hitherto been unaccustomed to—the cheerful idleness of a domestic circle.'

'Mrs. Grey,' said he, in a low, deep voice, but still

bending his bright eyes earnestly upon her, 'you see in others all the good that can be seen, and make it better. I never hoped that any human being could do for me what you have done. You have proved that I can make myself understood—perhaps even loved. You have awakened hope and energy within me, and you now draw out my whole confidence. From the lips of those I do esteem, distinction and approbation would be of inestimable worth; consequently, it has not been without emotions of excusable pleasure that I have lately heard Admiral Grey express his approval of my recent contributions in verse, as well as on political subjects, to our little rural newspaper.'

'Yours! My dear Lord Edenthorpe! how you do astonish me! Those papers yours which my Admiral declares have displayed, more than any other writing in modern times, talent, patriotism, sound principle, and incomparable eloquence!' exclaimed Mrs. Grey, in a blaze of astonishment. 'What will my husband say!'

'Nothing, yet. I keep my kind friend to her first promise, as there is a reason now which might cause me painful embarrassment if I were better known in this house. The kindness of such a friend as yourself, Mrs. Grey, is so new to me, that I scarcely yet know how to enjoy it fully. So long have I been accustomed to think and act in secret, that my thoughts, as well as my actions, are unlike those of other men—frequently out of all rule, yet always well intended, and sometimes, I trust, successfully planned.'

Again the countenance of Lord Edenthorpe became illuminated with that smile—so intellectual, yet so singularly attractive—which had a perfectly magical

effect on the few who ever saw it ; and Mrs. Grey could not but secretly think what a heart must be enshrined within, when the rays it shot forth were so preëminently beautiful. There was something, too, in the gentle exultation with which his last words were uttered which caught her attention. For a moment she felt perplexed ; but, the next instant, a sudden thought flashed into her mind, and she turned eagerly to Lord Edenthorpe, fixing on him a penetrating look of intense examination, while she replied, in her kindest tone, ‘ Many a random guess was hazarded in our family circle, my Lord, as to the name of that anonymous author who delighted us all in the country newspaper ; but you have enabled me to detect him. Another subject has also caused us much perplexity—an event which comes very near to a mother’s heart—which has caused the most unexpected joy in our house —— ’

Lord Edenthorpe started and colored deeply. He changed his position with evident uneasiness, and his eye seemed unable to meet that of Mrs. Grey, for he relapsed at once into that look of wooden immovability which his countenance had always hitherto exhibited in her presence.

‘ The appointment of my son Peter to the Camperdown was as unexpected to him as to all of us,’ continued Mrs. Grey, still fastening her eyes on as much of Lord Edenthorpe’s countenance as now remained visible, and that little had become of the deepest crimson. ‘ I suppose we shall never be able to detect who was our influential and generous friend on that occasion ? ’

With a strong effort, Lord Edenthorpe looked up ; and when he spoke, it was in a voice eloquent with deep,

concentrated emotion, but beautifully modulated also by sensibility and kindness: 'You have discovered, Mrs. Grey, the only unqualified happiness I have ever yet known from the possession of station and interest. Till these become useful to others they are valueless to myself. That moment shines like a diamond in the gloomy mine of memory to me, during which I witnessed a scene of family felicity which no time can ever efface from my recollection. I beheld the gay exultation of your spirited son, filled as he is with lofty hopes and noble aspirations. I sympathised in the joy of your kind, hospitable husband, and felt that it was my doing, though you were all free from any weight of obligation to one whom you scarcely knew, and could not like. I should be doubly oppressed in the society of your husband and son now, if I had the embarrassment of having done them this favor, which cost me no exertion. If I ever am to be loved, let it be for what I am, and not for what I have or what I do. An urgent application had been made last month to my late father for a ministerial seat now vacant in Parliament, which he could command in one of his boroughs. It was intended for a Commissioner of the Admiralty; and as my own wishes perfectly accorded with his obtaining it, I merely united the desired promise to ministers with a request that Captain Grey might be appointed to that station, which a few minutes before I had heard him express his wish to join.'

Mrs. Grey took the hand of Lord Edenthorpe in her own, and tears sprung into her eyes, while a smile flitted like a radiant coruscation over his young countenance. It was her turn now to be mute; and, after

struggling for some moments to articulate, she started up, unable to express one word of what she felt, and hurried out of the room.

After Lord Edenthorpe's recovery, he almost immediately returned home, but not before he had secretly requested Mrs. Grey to procure for him the pleasure of a visit from the whole party at Rockingham, to spend a week, which, with some difficulty, she persuaded her husband to pay. When the Admiral's carriage stopped before the entrance to Oakhampton Castle, Lord Edenthorpe stood on the steps, and, to the surprise of Admiral Grey, handed out the ladies; but to the far greater disappointment of Mrs. Grey, he seemed more than ever shy, awkward, and embarrassed. He could at once make any bodily effort, but the mind is not so easily commanded, and, for the first time, she began to fear that her experiment in accepting his invitation might, in the end, be a signal failure. Lord Edenthorpe conducted Mrs. Grey into the morning saloon, a scene of princely magnificence, which neither she nor the Admiral had entered for above twenty years; and after making a few of the usual remarks on such occasions, upon the rapid flight of time, and what a short period twenty years appears to the old, while to the young it seems a lifetime, she found the one-sided dialogue becoming rather heavy to be carried on, and proposed a tour of the house during the half-hour which was to intervene before the dressing bell. In that time she managed to entertain her young host aside, while the Admiral unfolded the 'Times,' and settled himself to a comfortable grumble at the reigning ministry, over a very ample fire and in a very ample arm-chair.

Meanwhile, the other miscellaneous members of the party became scattered throughout the numerous apartments, admiring all the noble specimens of painting and sculpture with which the walls were adorned. There genius immortalised genius. Busts of the most illustrious dead, and historical representations of past events, by the most distinguished artists, successively claimed their admiration; and even Captain Grey, who generally professed to see no difference between a Raphael and a sign-post, a masterly portrait or a penny print, gave way to the irresistible impulse of admiration, and dropped into a seat before a St. Sebastian by Guido, exclaiming, 'Well! certainly—as the Highlander said when taken round the pictures and statues in the Vatican—how beautiful are the works of nature! There is a sumptuousity about this place altogether, that is most impressive and astonishing! Inside and out it really is like Elysium!'

'Indeed, Peter!' said Laura slyly; 'when were you ast there?'

'Always when I am in your presence, and you know it! Happiness itself is not happy compared to me when we are together!'

'Peter! the wind has blown your hair into your eyes. You look a perfect fright now!' answered she with a bright laughing glance and a richer color than usual on her cheek.

'Laura! you play upon my feelings as if they were merely the notes of your own pianoforte! Will nothing ever take the mischief out of you? I must certainly say something now to mortify you, that we may be unfriends,' replied Peter, assuming a ludicrous expres-

sion of offended dignity. 'I hate being a mere old companion! It is no better than being an old glove or an old hat! One love is worth a thousand friendships, but you seem to intend that our old companionship shall never be more to each other than the poker and tongs. We must have a quarrel, and then I shall wither you with neglect, till you begin to see my value.'

'Now, Peter, you really look perfectly savage. I have no great experience in lovers, but the most authentic records describe them all as being a thin melancholy race, who write very dismal sonnets, therefore you must be an impostor. You have never been so polite to me as Red Ridinghood to the wolf, remarking what great eyes I have got! Even my new bonnet, which is thought so becoming, you have never so much as noticed! Altogether you are certainly never meant to be anything but Peter Grey, with whom tradition does not remember any time that I was not very good friends.'

'Then, Laura, pray try to look upon me now as you would on a Captain Montague of the Rifles, or Major Howard of the Guards, who had been for the first time introduced to you on our arrival here,' answered Peter, assuming the step, attitude, and tone of a military man, with laughable effect. 'I have not a chance of being seriously cared for as long as you preserve that friendly school-girl's recollection of Peter Grey in old times, during Mrs. Crabtree's reign of terror. I should greatly prefer if you would knock me down. Such remembrances of me as the scapegrace of our school-room days really spoil all at present, when even your very faults, Laura, if you have any, appear to me now like the spots on ermine-fur, only embellishments.'

‘Never attempt the serious style of conversation, Peter, for that would be a signal failure,’ answered Laura, coloring deeply, in spite of herself, but trying to keep up her usual tone of girlish caprice. ‘There never was anything poetical in the tie of your neck-cloth; your whole appearance is perfect prose; and, in short, you are quite suited for broad farce or genteel comedy; but the tragic muse herself might laugh, if you courted her seriously.’

‘I would rather she laughed than you, Laura,’ replied Captain Grey, with a comic mixture of pathos and humor. ‘It will be tragedy in earnest if my heart-strings are cracked, which they seem in the fair way of being; while you look no more concerned at the near prospect of my final departure for the East than if it were Ditto, or perhaps not so much. Yet, as Byron said, “Though unbelov’d, still let me love!”’

Laura’s deep-blue eyes became nearly closed, and she vainly struggled to hide her emotion, while Captain Grey, with increasing earnestness, which he tried to conceal under a lively exterior, continued: ‘You know perfectly that everything beautiful, happy, or desirable has been, from my earliest boyhood, connected with you, Laura; that since I was an interesting youth in the school-room, your image has acted on me like a conductor to lightning, bringing the purest and holiest of flames into my heart, there to consume every earthly or vulgar thought with which it might come in contact. Have I not carefully preserved, like a fly in amber, a whole museum of your stray gloves and broken shoe-ties, old bouquets, and decayed violets! And only think how difficult it must be for me now to say farewell!’

CHAPTER XVII

‘I may laugh when I’m merry, or sigh when I’m sad!’

LORD EDENTHORPE seemed scarcely to know Oakhampton now, with the bustling activity of life and enjoyment in every room. The apartments, formerly so gloomy and tenantless, became cheerful with an animated circle of guests; and, as Peter whispered to Laura, their noble host himself looked less like a magnified puppet than before.

Dinner being announced, Lord Edenthorpe handed down Lady Graham, who had looked, ever since she received a letter that day, feverishly restless, and so exceedingly absent, that it was evident she scarcely noticed Lord Edenthorpe’s approach, and mechanically took his offered arm without looking up, or remembering that it would have been etiquette to say something. No one could look at Lady Graham without becoming aware that something preyed that day very powerfully upon her nerves; and every time the door opened or the bell had occasion to be rung, Peter observed that she started, colored, and looked at the door as if she expected and greatly dreaded an arrival, though that seemed, at the same time, so impossible,

that he very nearly made some jesting remarks to his cousin on the subject of her mental vagrancy now, and evident expectation of something occurring soon.

Lord Edenthorpe, surrounded by so many friendly guests whose true good breeding and habitual tact rendered him the first object of their consideration, now began to look almost animated and almost happy. It seemed as if, under the genial influence of his own hospitality, and with an ardent desire to render his own house agreeable, he would soon realise all that Mrs. Grey hoped or wished in letting himself be known. The sound of merriment and voices round his own table evidently delighted Lord Edenthorpe; and the soft low laugh of Charlotte seemed infallibly to attract his ready attention; while she, as well as Mrs. Grey, had an almost instinctive consciousness what subjects were best suited to their host, and when it became time to change them.

Captain Grey had just said to himself—for he would say nothing satirical to another now—that, if Lord Edenthorpe continued to become so like other people, he would not know himself; and the Admiral was inwardly wondering to find that all the wines on table were worthy of Oakhampton in its best days, when suddenly the whole party felt their attention most unexpectedly roused by a loud ringing at the outer gate, followed by the grinding sound of carriage-wheels drawing up within the court-yard and before the principal entrance.

Lady Graham changed color, poured herself out a glass of water, and as nearly fainted as any one can do without becoming utterly insensible; but she had

recourse, as usual, to Ditto, and, snatching him up as if shocked at the noise of his barking, smothered him with kisses, and gorged him with the dinner which she had been unable herself to eat.

Charlotte could not but now think that, if nature had denied Lord Edenthorpe the power of expression in words, his eyes, at least, had very remarkable powers of language, as no physiognomy on earth could have exhibited more wonder and perplexity than that of their noble host. He glanced rapidly round the table, as if ascertaining that all the Rockingham party had already arrived ; and then, with a countenance expressing the most incomparable astonishment, Lord Edenthorpe's eyes once more assumed their favorite position of contemplating his plate. The ready color rushed into his face, and dyed the very roots of his hair ; but still the prevailing expression of his features denoted unutterable and rather nervous surprise.

After some moments of general perplexity had elapsed the dining-room door was suddenly opened, and a head appeared. As no part of the figure became visible, it seemed almost like the entrance of some animal head-foremost—particularly as the whole face was so planted out with mustachios, whiskers, and hair over the forehead, that little else could be seen ; and that little, though rather handsome, appeared so red and bloated as to be almost disgusting.

‘May I come in ?’ asked the head in a tone of jesting self-importance ; after which, immediately inserting his whole person into the room, Sir Fitzroy Perceval advanced, with a swaggering air of almost patronising cordiality, and extended his hand to the young peer,

saying, 'I really could not make up my mind to pass your gate this evening, Lord Edenthorpe, without paying my *devoirs*? Being *en route* to—to Lady Didcot's, I have taken the privilege of a cousin, and dropped in promiscuously, in this way, to inquire for you; and also, truth to say, because our unfortunate horses are so completely *frappé en haut*—as my friend Ardverekie expresses himself—that they could not have taken us another mile. The Oakhampton posting never was great even in your mother's time, when I used to be so often a welcome guest here; but now, positively, those at the door would disgrace a bathing-machine a Worthing. As I said to my daughter, who is sitting in the chariot, "any port in a storm"; and Oakhampton is changed indeed from old times, if belated travellers, especially relations, cannot find a dinner and a bed there when absolutely required.'

Sir Fitzroy had kept his first grasp of Lord Edenthorpe's hand, which he shook, so as to give it an appearance of mutual cordiality, at every pause in his oration; and though the expression of his host's countenance plainly intimated that a less agreeable visitor could not possibly have appeared, yet, after shaking Lord Edenthorpe's passive hand again with accelerated vehemence, he continued increasing in volubility, as if the necessity for an answer had never once occurred to his recollection.

'Now do confess at once, Edenthorpe, that you think me the most impudent fellow upon earth! It would quite relieve my conscience to hear you say so! Well; you are too good-natured, really, to relations! I see a hundred thousand kind welcomes in your eye! It was

quite a sudden thought, our looking in upon you; therefore Anna remained in the carriage, not knowing how the *ménage* of a gay young bachelor might be adapted for his lady cousins. She was perhaps a little afraid, too, of being indicted for stealing into a dwelling house; but since you are good enough to receive us so very cordially, I shall just step out, and insist upon her alighting. By the way, my friend Thornton—the best fellow upon earth—is here also, going along with me to transact some business at—at Didcot's, and also at Ardverekie's; therefore may I bring him up likewise?'

Sir Fitzroy appeared to have no more expectation of any answer than if he had spoken to an Egyptian mummy; therefore, with another energetic shake of the unresisting hand, he darted towards the door, and extended his ever-ready hand also, in passing, to Lady Graham, who tried, with a mingled aspect of scorn and apprehension, not to observe it; but Sir Fitzroy patted Ditto, said a few words to his unwilling cousin in a tone of easy intimacy, gained his point—as he was determined to do—of shaking hands with his repulsive-looking relative, and, leaving Lady Graham as pale as a winding-sheet, he instantly disappeared.

The Baronet's voice was then heard behind the door—loud, hilarious, and authoritative—ordering the servants to see that 'his things' were taken out of the carriage; and then adding in a matter-of-course tone, as if he were one of the family who had frequently been domesticated in the house, 'Put my portmanteau in that small blue-damask room, which I had when last here, at the right hand of the corridor. It was always my favorite snuggerly.'

The bustle behind scenes continued for some time. Boxes were to be heard lumbering up-stairs, and footmen flying in haste, while Sir Fitzroy spoke to them as if he considered Oakhampton a sort of Red Lion or Saracen's Head, where he might appropriate their services, and bespeak any accommodation that happened to be vacant.

'Here! John! or Thomas!—whatever your name is!—throw that carpet bag of Mr. Thornton's over your shoulder, and take it to the small white dimity room in the turret, next to mine. Tell Mrs. Anybody, the housekeeper, also to light a good rousing fire in the apartment she intends for Miss Perceval. The beds here have not had much airing lately!'

The Baronet at length, with an aspect of easy self-consequence that might have graced a dukedom reëntered the dining room, leading in his blushing young daughter, who looked ready to sink with shame and apprehension at making so unexpected an appearance. She was very tall and fair, with a countenance beautiful as any vision in a dream, having in its aspect something both fascinating and distinguished. There was in the expression of her eyes a peculiarly melancholy pathos like one used to much suffering, but she hastily drooped her long silken eyelashes, evidently unable to encounter the glance of those among whom she had been so suddenly plunged. A bright red spot burned on the centre of either cheek, otherwise she might have served as a model for Canova or Thorwaldsen of graceful timidity, while she shrunk almost behind Sir Fitzroy.

It was evident to Harry, who sat nearest the door,

that Miss Perceval had been recently weeping, and a tear still glittered on her burning cheek, while she shook her ringlets, tangled and dishevelled by the long journey, till they clustered round her agitated face, and hung down in rich masses below her waist. Harry had never seen a countenance more perfectly classical, as she stood there, with features as delicate as the finest cameo. He assured himself, with truth, that the delicacy of her mind might perhaps be equal to that of her beautiful profile, and Harry repeated to himself some not perfectly appropriate lines of Byron's.

When Lord Edenthorpe became conscious of Miss Perceval's presence, he rose, and, perhaps, had he looked up, he might for once have seen another person more painfully embarrassed than himself, when Sir Fitzroy hastily said, in a tone of bustling animation, 'My daughter must thank you, my Lord, for our most kind and cordial welcome! This is quite a reception in the old school, when cousins were cousins indeed, and relations were ready-made friends at first sight! Sit down, Anna! Though we have come late—at the half-price, I may say—yet here is a place for you near our hospitable host. I am sorry to displace you, Admiral Grey, but as my friend Didcot says, *place aux dames!* Shall I be *croupier?*' added Sir Fitzroy in an obliging tone; and dropping the arm of his tremulous daughter, he, with an air of the utmost nonchalance, placed a chair for himself where no one had hitherto been seated, and assumed the bottom of the table in the most matter-of-course way imaginable, saying, with a glance round, as if the whole scene were familiar to him, and affecting to sigh over his patriarchal reminiscences—

‘Ah! the gay old times I remember here, before you were born, Edenthorpe! I like to find myself once more at home in the old house, for auld lang syne! Even the ancient family pictures seem to welcome their unworthy descendant! Ah! there stands the old bust of Earl John!—honest, worthy man! How your father used to honor him!’

An awkward pause ensued, but in Sir Fitzroy’s presence its continuance was impossible; and the previous guests, little as they liked this intrusive associate, and unfit as the low, vulgar-looking Mr. Thornton appeared to enter such a house, or to sit above the salt, were induced, by consideration for Lord Edenthorpe, and pity for the almost sinking timidity of Miss Perceval, to assume an aspect of cheerful and of general sociability with the newly-arrived guests. Had Sir Edward, however, chanced to look at Lady Graham, he would have observed little cause to accuse her of being glad to see either her cousin Sir Fitzroy, or Mr. Thornton. Her forced civility to both was so evidently unwilling that, during the rest of dinner, she seemed in no degree to recover the shock of their first appearance.

‘I expected to find you alone, Edenthorpe, but here is a most agreeable surprise,’ exclaimed Sir Fitzroy, glancing doubtfully round at the other strangers ‘Your health, Edenthorpe! *A propos* of health—my receipt is, that nothing improves the health and digestion more than perpetual talking. My regular prescription during dinner, and for some hours afterwards, is to say all the block-headisms that enter my head, and after speaking first, to think long afterwards. Good conversation and a good bottle of claret make the very

elixir of life, without which existence is no existence. Ours is in general a sociable race. There have been exceptions, but in general we are all very conversable.'

'Very conversable, indeed!' echoed the echo, Mr. Thornton, filling his glass and looking oracular.

'I never let myself be sent to Coventry when I can help it; but certainly I used sometimes at your age, Edenthorpe, to be a very modest youth. Do you ever feel shy?' continued Sir Fitzroy, looking at his host with an air of the most unconscious *naïveté*. 'Conversation is a cheap luxury, and costs nothing, or I certainly could not indulge in it so much as I do.'

'It is a very cheap luxury,' observed Mr. Thornton, emphatically; 'very cheap indeed!'

'My plan always was to take dulness by the shoulders and thrust him out of doors, Edenthorpe, which I have no doubt you will very soon do here,' continued Sir Fitzroy, complacently sipping his sherry. 'My good, kind friend, your excellent mother used to say, with her pretty foreign accent, that the two things which spoiled society in her time were music and conversation! Capital mutton this! There is, as my friend Ardverekie says "no saddle like a saddle of mutton." Five years old this if it be a day! I am very particular about mutton, very!' continued Sir Fitzroy, as if proud of being so fastidious. 'What a favorite I was of your father's in those days! Well! I honor the tree that lent me its shade! Old times and old friends depart never to return.'

Sir Fitzroy slowly and pathetically refilled his glass, while the more he seemed at his ease, the more embarrassed and inaccessible became Lord Edenthorpe. No

image of stone could have seemed more rigid than the young peer, in every muscle of his countenance, and in every nerve of his body, while he kept his eyes fastened on the table-cloth; and when he looked up for an instant, it seemed as if a marble bust had been endowed with a pair of living eyes, while Anna Perceval, in agitated contrast, sat with burning cheeks and down-cast looks, so crimsoned with agitation that it could scarcely have been supposed there was as much blood in her whole body as rushed over her face and neck. A silence had now fallen over Lady Graham and several of the party, which seemed like that of the seven sleepers; but Sir Fitzroy became every instant more perfectly easy and self-satisfied under the burden of supporting, at his own end of the table, nearly the whole conversation. Miss Perceval had been for a few minutes conversing in a low under-tone with Harry, who was delighted to draw out his timid-looking companion, but Sir Fitzroy interrupted them, as if resolved to be the centre of all attraction. 'Anna, let me recommend you a slice of the saddle. You are wasting a good appetite on very indifferent veal, and I thought all my family had resembled the Lord Mayor's fool, who liked whatever is best, and plenty of it. I remember, Edenthorpe, how Didcot and Ardverkie jested with your worthy father once, on his showing them these fine picture-frames when they were expecting dinner, and I said then, that there was more gilding in this room than carving. I had, as my friend Brechin used to remark, "a two-parson power in respect to appetite." Anna, look at this beautiful fruit ' I know you are a great strawberry-ologist.'

Rapidly as Sir Fitzroy articulated, he nevertheless found time to establish active operations against the champagne and burgundy ; while, occasionally, a slight derisive smile passed almost imperceptibly over the edge of their glasses, between the voluble Baronet and Mr. Thornton. Anna Perceval seemed to become more and more embarrassed at every word her father uttered, as if she were answerable for all his assertions or remarks, and felt that they were ill-timed. She raised her eyes sometimes to his with an almost supplicating expression ; and, after clandestinely giving a furtive glance round, as if anxious lest the forbearance of the party might wear out, she silently dropped her eyes to conceal their agitated expression ; and only by her heightened color could any one guess that she listened. Miss Perceval's young countenance was not deficient in the dignity that denotes a proper self-respect ; yet there was in it an air of suffering painful to behold, and a look of experience far beyond her tender years. She seemed to Harry Graham so almost supernaturally beautiful, that any other young lady he ever before admired was comparatively a mere imposition ; and having now endeavored, with some success, to draw her into conversation, Harry caught a look of lurking vivacity at last in her splendid eyes which perfectly dazzled him. It was a sparkle of merriment which gleamed for an instant, and as instantly vanished with a sigh ; yet so distinctly was every flitting emotion written on Anna's features that Harry often afterwards, during dinner, looked round, to read there what she thought or felt.

‘Edenthorpe, you and I have not often had a glass of

wine together; but it is never too late for cousins to begin. Shall I wait till you ask me?' continued Sir Fitzroy, in a matter-of-course tone; and filling up his bumper, he sent round the bottle without waiting for any answer. Again Charlotte observed a secret glance exchanged between Sir Fitzroy and his agent, the meaning of which it was impossible to penetrate, or even to guess; but she wondered at it, and determined to watch all that followed. Soon after, Mr. Thornton fixed his cat-like eyes intently on the young peer, with an expression so sinister and observant that Charlotte became still more perplexed, especially as it almost appeared to her that Mr. Thornton wished the whole company to perceive the contemptuous pity which he affected to throw into his own hideous, but sufficiently expressive, countenance. With a quiet smile, a slightly perceptible shake of the head, a very obvious shrug of the shoulders, and a prodigious elevation of his bushy eyebrows, Mr. Thornton then fixed a disparaging look once more on Lord Edenthorpe, and, taking up a walnut, he significantly looked at Sir Fitzroy, saying, 'This walnut is cracked and empty.'

'Yes,' replied the Baronet dryly, 'like some heads I have seen in this wide world of ours. One meets with men sometimes who look very much as if they would willingly shrink into a nut-shell.'

Seeing that Charlotte observed their little pantomime, Sir Fitzroy, assuming a jocular gravity, said to her, though the ice she was cating seemed scarcely so cold as her manner to him, 'Whether a man or a walnut be cracked, they are both well worth observing. I suppose, of course, Edenthorpe, you take your

seat in the House of Lords next session? Anna, try some cherries! I shall feel proud, as a kinsman, to hear of your talented father's place being so adequately filled. I can distinctly see, in my mind's eye, a future column of "The Times," beginning, "Lord Edenthorpe, with luminous perspicuity, made a long speech at great length ——"

'Yes, Sir Fitzroy,' chimed in Mr. Thornton, gravely: 'at great length.'

'Accustomed as I am to public speaking,' continued the Baronet, affecting a familiar tone of bantering good-humor, and then, in a subdued voice, he hummed the words of that well-known glee—

"Mister Speaker, tho' 'tis late,
I must lengthen the debate."

Sir Fitzroy seemed by no means unaccustomed to public laughing, for he now laughed immoderately, covering his face with his handkerchief, and his faithful imitator, Mr. Thornton, followed the example. At this moment Lord Edenthorpe suddenly looked up, and fastened his eyes, with a penetrating gaze, upon Sir Fitzroy, while his countenance assumed an air of inexpressible dignity. There was a fire in his eye, a depth and power in his expression, a look of manly and indignant feeling which pervaded every feature, while the words that he meant to speak seemed to become almost visible upon his lips, and Mrs. Grey hoped he was about to be irritated out of his usual impassibility, and to burst forth with the impassioned energy that would have suited the occasion. Evidently suspecting that he was ridiculed at his own table, Lord

Edenthorpe had half risen from his seat, when suddenly his eye fell on the countenance of Anna Perceval, whose large, tearful eyes were fixed upon him with a deprecating expression of apologising timidity. The young girl's appealing look was so irresistibly touching and conciliatory, that Lord Edenthorpe paused while his eye yet flickered with intense emotion. A short but stern contest evidently took place within his mind; and then, as if a fiery steed had been checked by its rider, he seemed suddenly to pull himself up. Charlotte never had observed a change on any countenance so entire, so marked, or half so interesting. A thunder-cloud had seemed about to burst, which suddenly cleared off into sunshine; and when Lord Edenthorpe resumed his passive attitude, his countenance shone for one brief moment with that benignant smile, so rarely seen, so fascinating, and so peculiar to himself. For an instant he looked at Charlotte, and her eye fell before his, but any countenance she had ever looked upon was like a taper beside the sun, compared with his when thus illuminated with intellect and feeling.

CHAPTER XVIII

‘Those hangings with their worn-out laces,
Long beards, long noses, and pale faces,
Are such an antiquated scene,
They overwhelm me with the spleen.’

COWPER.

CAPTAIN GREY was surprised in the evening to perceive Sir Fitzroy retire for a moment in a clandestine manner to the writing-table, where he hurriedly wrote down a few words on a slip of paper, which he quietly twisted up; and soon afterwards he stole an opportunity to give the small billet into Lady Graham's hands, who received it with evident unwillingness. The expression of dislike and fear which passed over her countenance was not to be mistaken; and when, some minutes afterwards, she sauntered to another end of the drawing-room, where she privately opened the note so surreptitiously given, she started, colored violently, and then, with an expression of the most painful perplexity, as well as of indignation, looked first at Sir Fitzroy, and then at Lord Edenthorpe. Lady Graham finally tore the note angrily to tatters, and buried herself in a deep and solitary reverie, during which her agitation increased to such an excess that she shook, at last, as in the coldest blast of winter, while her thoughts rested immovably on these words* of Sir Fitzroy's note—

‘My plan prospers. You and I, as the nearest relatives, and Thornton, as the man of business, have only to unite our evidence that nothing out of Bedlam is more lunatic than Lord Edenthorpe. Anna has not yet submitted, but she shall. If you hesitate, the consequences be on your own head, and most crushingly they will fall.’

Music had, in the meantime, been called for by Mrs. Grey, who thought it would relieve her young host to see most of the party occupied. Charlotte, who thought it as much a matter-of-course at her mother’s desire to sing as to stir the fire, or shut the door when asked, sat down to begin the concert, though laughingly asserting that she would incur the execration of the whole party for interrupting so much pleasant conversation. She then entreated that some one would accompany her, and obligingly throw in a few notes to support her courage. Harry replied that he would have been glad to perform a duet with Charlotte, but the only music-master he ever consulted had said that he possessed only two good notes in his voice, therefore, as no songs are composed for such a limited scale, he had given up the point. ‘But,’ added he, ‘I sing internally—you can have no idea how very well my mental singing goes on, and how admirably I can execute the most difficult passages as long as they are inaudible.’

Laura, who had been most scientifically taught the piano, afterwards performed, in the best Italian and German style, some next to miraculous pieces, the *chef-d’œuvres* of Moschelles and Thalberg, while nothing to her seemed difficult, though to most people they would have been impossible. Every note of the piano

had to do triple duty, at the rate of so many times a minute, while even Babbage's calculating machine could not have reckoned their number!

'Your master must be a patient man, Laura, to hear you out through so long-winded a piece! How I hate those airs with variations that never vary!' exclaimed Harry, after the finest crash of Laura's thunder-and-lightning performance. 'Variations always seem to me like mixing water with brandy—the more water the weaker and poorer the result—and when I seem to have caught the tune, it jilts my ear, and flies off again to the antipodes. Give me something, Laura, to remember afterwards, to whistle over again in my room, to haunt me for days in my walks, and keep me awake all night. These rascally little snatches of the air tantalise me, like the string and a ball with which a mischievous boy torments a kitten.'

'I protest, Harry, you are like the monkey on the hand-organ, who had tired of all his master's tunes! You have not an atom of taste!'

'Not for that style of hurricane, certainly! I hate unmusical music! If you must have a stormy piece, I could put up with "Blow, Gentle Gales." The last time you and Peter sung that song the minute-gun came in with startling effect, and Peter's despair, with a note down to Z, was most heart-rending. It really seemed to come out at his toe! I never heard so deep a note of despair in my life; so do let us, if you have no insuperable objection, Captain, have the "Gentle Gales" again.'

'I am not fond of having a breeze with Laura, as she always gets the better of me; but really music

was such a treat, after being so long at sea, that I almost embraced the music-stool on my return home,' said Captain Grey, taking his place behind Laura at the piano. 'We shall make a charming tableau now of Rizzio and Queen Mary, but if you observe any discord arise between us, lay all the blame on that termagant Laura! She tyrannizes over me frightfully at the piano, and I really deserve better treatment.'

Laura smiled and changed color, as if the wind had blown over a field of roses, but she played a brilliant prelude, and their voices, when mingled together, increased in depth and expression after the tremulousness had diminished with which Laura had begun. She never attempted the *Prima Donna* songs, which an opera-singer spends half her life in practising to achieve, and which some young ladies expect to give in perfection after being 'crammed' in a few lessons; but Laura never was out of tune, and articulated so distinctly that the very stops and commas seemed there, which added much to the enjoyment of those listeners, unscientific enough to think the words and sentiments of a song important!

All this time Anna Perceval looked painfully shy and nervous; therefore Charlotte felt convinced that, in her case, as well as in Lord Edenthorpe's, the greatest kindness was to appear as if they were both entirely overlooked. At last, however, Mrs. Grey, thinking she might perhaps play a little, and that at all events it would be polite to ask her, kindly inquired whether she was musical.

'All young ladies are more or less so,' answered Miss Perceval, diffidently raising her large eyes, with

a sweet and sad expression, which seemed pleading to be excused, while she darted a frightened glance at Sir Fitzroy, and hurriedly whispered, in a low, clear, youthful voice, but with a peculiar gracefulness of gesture as unstudied as her words, an earnest entreaty not to be asked.

It was too late, however. Sir Fitzroy had understood the dumb-show on both sides, and starting up from a *tête-à-tête* in a distant corner with Lady Graham, which he seemed glad of the opportunity to break up, advanced to the piano, and, approaching Anna with the air of chivalrous gallantry which would-be-juvenile fathers affect now towards their daughters, he offered her his arm, saying, 'Is my darling girl professing an inability to sing? It is a sure sign of young ladies intending to perform wonders when they begin with a thousand coquettish apologies. Now, Anna, as boarding-school misses say to each other, "Please do!—ple-as-e." Your old master, Montoni, used to say that there are but two kinds of fiddlers in the world—those who fiddle very well, and those who fiddle very badly. Let our friends judge, then, to which class you belong.'

The timid girl seemed more afraid of her father than even of the company, and, therefore, making no more hesitation, she obeyed his unwelcome mandate, with a good humored but agitated manner, and took her seat at once, while Sir Fitzroy stood beside her in a somewhat melodramatic attitude, with his arms folded. His brows were knit, too, and his lips compressed, in order to conceal an expression of triumphant expectation that glittered in his eyes, such as a showman

might have felt in exhibiting his automaton. After carelessly playing a brilliant prelude, Anna began with some low, deep, and exquisitely musical notes, but soon she seemed, by a strong effort, to recover herself from the nervous panic of beginning. Before many minutes had elapsed, she gained entire possession of her truly magnificent voice, which then literally electrified the whole party, and delighted them. From her inmost soul apparently there now burst forth a flood of melody so harmonious, so brilliant, so original, so full of expression and feeling, that it seemed to many of the listeners, who stood breathless with interest, almost supernatural, and as if some good and happy spirit from a better world had unexpectedly dropped down amongst them. Soon the sentiment of her music became changed, and now it seemed as if the real feelings of her heart spoke out, for the depth of expression with which Anna Perceval seemed to pour forth her very soul, became perfectly overpowering, and almost terrible, so deep was the emotion which her voice betrayed, so mournful and so desolate the intensity of its sadness, till at length it died away, from the loud, full, and decided tone of masterly power, into the softest thrilling whisper of deep, concentrated emotion.

‘How could so large a voice get into so small a person?’ exclaimed Peter, in an aside to Harry, which was the only interruption to the general silence, except the tuneless, grating voice of Mr. Thornton, which formed a sort of bass accompaniment in the distance, while he spoke earnestly to Lady Graham, till she suddenly and angrily broke away, hurrying towards the piano, and

taking her seat on the sofa with a look of ill-suppressed agitation, beating time, out of time, to the music, and tearing her bouquet to atoms.

There was a degree of romance in Miss Perceval's voice truly fascinating, which, when united to the singular dramatic interest she produced, had great effect, and displayed all the skill of a perfect artist. While the heart of every one present vibrated under the irresistible influence of her voice, she seemed almost to have forgotten that there was in the world a living being but herself. With no more effort than that of a lark soaring towards the sun, she poured out a magical stream of harmony not to be surpassed, while it was impossible not to feel emotions of pleasing astonishment and of almost mysterious delight.

Mrs. Grey started when she felt her own tears falling on her hand with the depth of her emotion; and Charlotte stood transfixed in rapturous delight, while the piano itself seemed to speak with a perfect witchery that absorbed her whole attention and roused her best feelings to ecstasy.

If torrents of admiration could have made Anna Perceval happy, she might have been so, for the timid-looking girl now obtained a degree of applause and of *éclat* which seemed on her part undesired. Music was to her like daylight, as natural as delightful, and almost as necessary, but its greatness and truth depended to her on that simplicity which is the perfection of art; and, while her brilliant elastic voice expanded to an extraordinary degree, it was the concentrated feeling within which gave it soul and spirit to awaken the most dormant sensibility.

Charlotte, in silent but subdued delight, glanced round the room for sympathy, and close by her side she found Lord Edenthorpe, who had stood up, so filled with astonishment and admiration that he had forgotten to be embarrassed. His eyes were fastened with eager interest on the lovely singer, while he evidently followed every word she said as well as every note she sung, and gave a deep gasp of emotion when Anna, after singing a Spanish air, evidently intended for him, suddenly stopped. Lord Edenthorpe's eyes had now acquired a look of the brightest intelligence, a smile played round his finely formed mouth, and he insensibly beat time by an almost imperceptible motion of his head. A moment afterwards, however, Lord Edenthorpe's eye was caught by a sharp examining stare from Sir Fitzroy; after which, evidently to his still greater annoyance, Mr. Thornton came up to him, assuming a swaggering air of intimacy, and said, with an encouraging laugh, 'What do you think of that, my Lord?—not amiss!—capital voice!—reminds one of Vauxhall! Did you ever go there to hear Madame Fandango? She is a thunderer! As the Frenchman says, charming, *magnifique*! pretty well!'

Lord Edenthorpe fixed his eyes on the ground, made some short sound that seemed intended for a reply, and, instantly sitting down, folded his arms, dropped his chin on his breast, and became as inaccessible to all scrutiny as if asleep.

'Very nicely sung indeed!' observed Lady Graham in a tone of patronising importance, as if the company must have been at a loss what judgment to pronounce until she thus elected herself foreman of the jury:

‘still rather amateur-ish, Anna, and the adagio a little too fast. There are few in this country who have more true enjoyment of really good music than myself, or a more correct natural taste, but I am painfully fastidious. My dear Anna! really, with a little more practice, that contralto of yours would become excellent. Rather more expression, too, would be a great improvement, but all in good time.’

‘Pshaw!’ whispered Peter to Charlotte. ‘Lady Graham reminds one of people in the shilling gallery at a theatre pretending to criticise Shakspeare!’

Positively,’ said Harry, as the last vibrating notes died away, ‘Circe herself was nothing to you, Miss Perceval; and any syren who ever sung might die of envy. Your voice is the essence of nightingales double-distilled.’

‘You are certainly making yourself merry at my expense!’ replied Anna, in a tone of gentle, ingenuous satisfaction at the pleasure she had so evidently given. She then added, with a sudden change of manner, and a searching look of earnest kindness towards Lord Edenthorpe, whom she obviously addressed—‘It will especially please me if my music be any gratification to the cousin whom we came here to visit.’

Sir Fitzroy ground his teeth together to prevent an angry oath from escaping from his lips, at this unexpected appeal from his daughter to Lord Edenthorpe’s judgment, but the young peer raised his head, hurriedly swept the dark hair from his forehead, and stood up. It became evident to the few now assembled round the piano that his eyes had been filled with tears, but he walked up at once to Miss Perceval, and,

holding out his hand to her, said, in a very low, nearly inaudible tone, of deep emotion, 'As no words could express what I have felt, I never less regretted the want of language. Either your music is more than mortal, or all I ever heard before is less.'

The sensation of secret surprise among the very few who heard the voice of their young host at all was indescribable; and, though not a look expressed the astonishment of any one, yet they evidently expected the sky to fall immediately. If a thunder-bolt had split over Sir Fitzroy's head he could scarcely have looked more annoyed and dumb-founded, as he stood leaning his arm on the high marble chimney-piece, and gazed at Lord Edenthorpe with a look of unsurpassable wonder, which he by no means attempted to conceal from the object of it. In proportion to the Baronet's evident chagrin was the almost triumphant expression of pleasure in the countenance of his beautiful young daughter, who now fixed her eyes first on Sir Fitzroy and then on Mr. Thornton with a look of almost resolute defiance which it would have been difficult for any one else in the room to define. Sir Fitzroy gazed at Lord Edenthorpe with a very sinister look; an expression of rigid determination appeared in his firmly-closed mouth; and he muttered, in a low tone, intended for Captain Grey only to hear, 'Lunacy itself is not more lunatic! Poor fellow! it is a sad sight!'

The Baronet, evidently determined to prevent any farther intercourse between Lord Edenthorpe and Anna, now made an energetic attempt to look indifferent, and desired his daughter, in a peremptory, not-to-be-disputed accent, to sing one of his favorite ballads with

the words by Burns. It had a new and thrilling effect to hear Anna's voice now, trembling visibly, as it did, from recent agitation; for Sir Fitzroy had muttered something in her ear, when she hesitated, which caused his daughter's cheek to assume a pallid hue.

In a simple tone, then, she obeyed her father's mandate—not, as formerly, made in the gentleman-like style of a request, but issued as an angry command. It was with no ordinary feelings that the fascinated little circle again listened to the soft, bird-like voice, trembling with mingled emotions, in which Anna commenced her song, which gradually died away into a wild and melancholy strain like the distant sound of an *Æolian* harp.

‘If Burns could come back at this moment to the earth, how proud he would be of his own words! There is a tear in every note!’ whispered Harry, while Anna, with her distinct articulation, sung those touching lines in a voice of thrilling pathos which added to the expression, though it diminished the brilliancy, of her performance—

“From thee, Eliza, I must go,
And from my native shore;
The cruel fates between us throw
A boundless ocean's roar.”

In a tone of unusual emotion, Peter then said to Laura, ‘That song must surely have been sung to me in my cradle, it seems so dear and familiar to my feelings! I go, Laura, where boundless oceans roar and shall divide me from all I love. The whole universe has for me but two divisions—where Laura is,

and where she is not; where I shall hear your voice, and where I shall hear it no more; where I can look on your face, as now, or only remember it with sorrowful affection; where I can no longer grasp your hand in mine, or where I may, perhaps, be allowed at last to return, dearest Laura, covered with well-earned laurels, to claim you as my own!’

Large tears had gathered into Laura’s eyes; but, after a desperate struggle — determined not to give way or to be overcome by her feelings—she turned to Peter with a look of merry caprice, and held up her finger to enjoin silence, saying, while Captain Grey seized the threatening hand, ‘Now, Peter, unless you have something more appropriate to say, listen to the music. Day and night are really too short for enjoying such a treat!’

Amidst a tempest of applause which ensued when Anna concluded the concert, Captain Grey, before he relinquished Laura’s hand, had ventured to kiss it; and she, overcome with unexpected emotion, hurried out of the room. Sir Fitzroy instantly approached the distant sofa on which Peter was ruminating agreeably over all that had passed; and, taking the place which Laura had so hastily relinquished, he said to Mr. Thornton, loud enough for Captain Grey to hear, and, no doubt, intending him to do so, ‘I wonder, Thornton, when my poor cousin Edenthorpe will take Hotspur’s leap at the moon. He looks quite ready for it to-night. I am glad, Captain Grey, that you like my Anna’s voice,’ added the Baronet, taking advantage of the obvious effect produced by his daughter to place himself on companionable, easy terms with Peter.

‘Our family are all musical. Anna’s ancestors played well on the piano before pianos were invented. Her music master in London was the first of his day—two guineas a lesson; but, poor man! almost deranged latterly!’

‘Any one to be a tolerable musician must be more than half mad,’ observed Peter, carelessly. ‘In fact, everybody is mad about something.’

‘More or less,’ replied Sir Fitzroy, assuming a rather confidential tone. ‘I see it has struck you that my cousin Edenthorpe is a little—very little—queerish!’

‘A little!—a very great deal! He is, without exception, one of the oddest mortals I ever encountered!’

‘Absent!’ continued Sir Fitzroy, in a low smothered tone; ‘and so startled when awakened from his fits of absence—yet what has he to disturb him?’

‘One might almost fear,’ whispered Mr. Thornton, in a half-jesting tone, but stealing a glance of penetration at Captain Grey, ‘that he might some day blow out his brains.’

‘Yes! if he has any brains to blow out,’ replied Sir Fitzroy, dryly; ‘but you know well, Thornton, that he never had any—never from his boyhood—as I was so often told formerly, but I never would believe it.’

‘He has a look,’ added Mr. Thornton, mysteriously, ‘like a man that would cut his throat to-morrow. I am seldom mistaken in a man’s expression, and especially Edenthorpe’s, after knowing him so well in his father’s time.’

‘Perhaps,’ replied Captain Grey, ‘you think our

host is the man who, for fraudulent purposes, concealed that he was mad.'

'My friend Thornton there, the best fellow upon earth—the very best—' Peter stared at the paragon in silence, but made no comment—'Thornton assures me, on the honor of a w. s., that, during the short three months that have elapsed since Edenthorpe had possession of this estate, the enormous sum of £20,000 has been drawn from his banker's. No one can guess or imagine a single thing that my cousin can have done with it. Rather odd, don't you think? He is never seen with as much money as would be change for a note, or would buy a penny letter-stamp; therefore, how can we account for it all?'

'Fortunately, we are not called on to do so,' replied Captain Grey, somewhat annoyed at being drawn into this gossiping interview.

'It is natural for the next heir to feel some curiosity how such a sum is melted away,' continued Mr. Thornton, earnestly. 'From his infancy the late Lord never trusted him with a guinea of pocket-money.'

Sir Fitzroy's dark flashing eyes were fixed upon Captain Grey with a scrutinising gaze; but the young sailor's thoughts were hovering backwards and forwards on such a variety of other subjects, that he had no idea of the eager notice taken by his two companions of his most careless remark, as well as of the impression they were desirous to make upon him.

Before Captain Grey could glance round again to Lord Edenthorpe the Baronet continued, in a loud, animated voice, which drowned every competitor,

and took up the subject on which the company in general were talking.

‘I beg to agree with the person who spoke last. A gay house like this, in the country, is the idlest of all places. Perpetual eating, with lucid intervals. We are gong’d down to breakfast at ten; the ladies have worsted-work, with an accompaniment of small talk, till two; then driving in the carriages, with another accompaniment of small talk, till seven; and afterwards, in the evening, music, small talk, and curling their hair, till midnight. I have very little doubt that they talk even in their sleep. We gentlemen do not make so constant an expenditure of ideas, but prefer taking in stock sometimes, from books or newspapers.’

‘If all that some of our friends have spoken during the course of one year had been daguerreotyped,’ said Peter, gravely, ‘what a number of thick, large, closely-printed folios it would make!’

‘But there are people who, in the game of conversation, put nothing into the pool,’ added Sir Fitzroy, glancing slyly towards Lord Edenthorpe; ‘what a scanty pamphlet they would produce!’

‘During my last visit at Lady Glentilt’s, I drew up a code of rules and regulations for visitors, which she has promised to print in letters of gold over her drawing-room chimney-piece, as they were carried *nem. con.*,’ said Captain Grey. ‘The first was that no one shall speak above two hours at a time. Secondly, that no breakfast shall be ordered by any lazy visitor after five in the afternoon, nor any evening tea after one in the morning.’

‘That is very arbitrary,’ observed Laura, with a playful laugh. ‘You cannot expect any free and independent young ladies to submit!’

‘But our next law was yet more stringent, ordaining that an entire hour should elapse between every meal.’

‘Then all your unfortunate ill-used guests are to be starved?’ said Sir Fitzroy. ‘I finished a perfect shoal of herrings this morning, and made all the toast-racks look foolish; but that did not interfere with luncheon!’

‘You will be still more shocked at the next rule—that all the company must assemble at the dinner-table before the cloth is removed.’

‘You’ll never gain that point,’ replied Harry, dogmatically. ‘Never!’

‘I am sure you will approve of the fifth regulation—that strangers be informed when they come down at three to breakfast that it is not dinner.’

‘There is some sense in that! When I see people eating broiled kidneys and beef-steaks after one o’clock, I am apt to ask myself what it means,’ said Sir Edward. ‘St. Patrick had a dish that never could be emptied, but he would also have needed an appetite that never could be filled.’

‘The rule that follows is very humane and considerate—that no noise be made during the evening, in case of awakening the company.’

‘Extremely attentive and right!’

‘No. 9. That ladies who can sing are not to plead a bad cold during above ten months of the year, and any one whose voice is essential to a chorus shall take her place at the piano before the last bar.’

'Is that necessary?' asked Harry; 'not being musical myself, it had not occurred to me!'

'Also that supper shall not be served up until five minutes after the last glass of wine at dessert, that there may be no hurry in laying the cloth.'

'Quite proper, but troublesome.'

'What do you think of this—that no lady shall go out for her airing after breakfast till the moon rises, for fear of being overturned in the dark. Our next rule is very humane—that every coachman may, after waiting four hours, put up his horses without further orders. You will approve, too, of No. 20—that not more than nine of any family shall be allowed to speak at once; and, lastly, that the noise of laughter and talking at dinner must positively not be heard above two miles off. Harry, as the needle said to the thread, I have you in my eye.'

'These rules would certainly promote quietness and regularity,' observed Laura, with a look of sly humor; 'but I doubt their being so strictly observed. The only rules people ever keep long within, are the rules of the Queen's Bench, or of Holyrood Sanctuary.'

Scarcely had Laura uttered these words before she felt that the allusion might be unpleasant to Sir Fitzroy, and she colored intensely; while the Baronet, so recently liberated from very long confinement, strolled to the window, humming a tune, and trying to look as if he had not heard the mention of a place which he had lately known only too well.

'*A propos* of rules!' exclaimed Sir Fitzroy, turning suddenly round. 'I never could either make rules or keep them; but I went yesterday to see our new

County Lunatic Asylum. A strange sight! I fancied that I had long ago lost the faculty of being astonished, but this did surprise me! It is under admirable management, and I quite envied the patients. They have every amusement of gentlemen in their senses—billiard tables, pianofortes, gardening, bowling greens, and balls every night, where they have mad partners, and mad musicians. But nothing amused me more than, even at a lunatic asylum, in these publishing times, to see authors writing books; and perhaps many of the tribe who are at large might very fitly be added to the company!’

‘I should guess that they might be rather in the “Bombastes Furioso” style,’ observed Captain Grey. ‘Odes to the moon probably a favorite subject!’

‘They have actually a printing press in the house, continually in action,’ added Sir Fitzroy, laughing, ‘and publish among themselves a monthly magazine. Some of the patients were writing articles when I saw them, and others correcting the press, with as sane and sensible a look as some of ourselves.’

‘Nothing personal intended, I hope, Sir Fitzroy,’ said Peter, laughing. ‘Could you favor me with a letter of recommendation to go there?’

‘You are not perhaps the person here most fitted for admission,’ muttered Sir Fitzroy, between his teeth; and then, directing Harry’s eyes by a side-long glance towards Lord Edenthorpe, he added, ‘A few of the patients were silent, morose, and suspicious of all around, living in the dreary monotony of melancholy madness. That is indeed a sad sight when you see it, as I have done; and those possessed with a dumb spirit

were always the most hopeless cases.' Captain Grey, I used to be reckoned a first-rate actor in mad scenes at college, and must really show you those I witnessed yesterday, as enacted by one of the most frenzied lunatics recently shut up.'

With a wonderful power of mimicry, Sir Fitzroy, standing at the open window, suddenly assumed a look and attitude of furious insanity, while he represented several scenes and dialogues with fearful power, till having become more and more excited, Mrs. Grey secretly entreated Peter to make him desist, for it almost seemed as if the jest had become in earnest. Captain Grey might as well, however, have spoken to the wind, for, in a strange, wild paroxysm, Sir Fitzroy broke into vehement declamation, and rushed towards the open window as if he were about to precipitate himself to the ground. At this moment, Anna, who stood close beside it, gently but firmly laid her hand on his arm, fixed her eyes on her father's, and led him to a seat. Then, with a strange, unnatural laugh, Sir Fitzroy seemed to recover himself, and sinking back on the sofa, while a wild gleam still glittered in his eye, exclaimed, 'I really had got so completely into the spirit of that scene that, if somebody had not brought me to myself, I should certainly have leaped out! We all need looking after, and it is well for those who have friends that will take care of them, whether with or without their consent. I thank you, Anna! When any of us become unfit to manage ourselves, you would make an excellent keeper!'

CHAPTER XIX.

‘ Unconscious, albeit turn’d of quick seventeen,
That she was fair, or dark, or short, or tall;
She never thought about herself at all. ’

BYRON.

WHEN Harry returned next morning from a long ride with his father and Miss Perceval, he found Charlotte and Laura seated alone at work, when he hurried into the library, exclaiming, in a tone of eager, wondering animation, ‘ Now, young ladies, guess whom I saw this moment, walking *tête-à-tête* together like the most intimate and attached old friends! Guess the two most unlikely people in the whole world to enter into that sort of arm-in-arm, chit-chat companionship for a long stroll. Do you give it up? No! pray make one trial of your skill!’

‘ Well, then,’ said Laura, who looked unusually out of sorts for her, and rather dull, ‘ to begin with an impossibility, let it be papa and Mr. Thornton.’

‘ That is pretty well, Laura, but not quite sufficiently marvellous. Try again!’

‘ Sir Fitzroy Perceval and Lady Graham?’

‘ No, no! stupid Laura! you may see that any day! I perceived them twice out alone together yesterday, for an hour or two, when my father was at Bencrosse,

hunting; and again this morning, when I almost thought Sir Edward observed them also. No; guess again; and try to be a little ingeniously improbable.'

Now, Laura would not for the world have named the name of Peter; though, truth to say, he had broken an appointment with herself, and he had not since been an instant out of her perplexed and astonished thoughts. A little jealous pang had darted into her heart when the idea occurred to her, some hours previously, that, as Miss Perceval had likewise been all morning absent, Peter might be riding, walking, or singing with her: and this dark suspicion was frightfully confirmed when Harry added, 'Now, Laura, seeing that you are evidently not in the brightest of moods, but rather the reverse, I shall help to solve the difficulty. Whom do you guess I saw Captain Peter Grey confidentialising with an hour since, while he really had that look of deep and earnest thought which our friend can sometimes assume? They seemed really as happy and at home together as any two could be.'

'Then it is scarcely worth a guess now, Harry; you have made the answer so easy,' replied Laura, coloring deeply, and speaking in a tone of pique which her brother thought incomprehensible. 'I have no doubt they are both the most agreeable of companions, perfectly suitable in all respects.'

'So it appeared,' replied Harry, in a tone of continued surprise; 'the two seemed most deeply occupied and delighted with each other! They never so much as looked round when we cantered past!'

'The acquaintance must have progressed very

rapidly !' replied Laura, in a peculiar tone, while Peter's long and devoted constancy never appeared so precious to her as now that, for the first time in her life, it seemed to have become doubtful ; 'like Aladdin's taste in lamps, perhaps Peter prefers new friends to old ones !'

'Now, Laura ! how unlike that is to your usual good-nature ! Surely, if Peter can make an agreeable impression on his present companion, it would be much for the happiness of both, to get on well together. You should on this occasion wish him at least to do his best.'

'My wishes on the subject are not likely to be much consulted,' replied Laura, with an unaccountable glance, and a somewhat dogged voice, when the door opened, and Peter appeared, his countenance glowing with exercise, good-humor, and animation. No one, in general, entered a room so well as Captain Grey, and there is a great deal of character in the various ways of doing so. He had usually a graceful, half-diffident self-possession in his aspect, and something appropriate ready to say ; but, considering that 'where none admire 'tis useless to excel,' on this occasion his genius was quite wasted. He hastened straight up to Laura, who sat diligently occupied, counting stitches in an audible voice over a pair of slippers, which Peter had long entertained a private hope that she intended for himself, and so engrossed did she appear, as to be either insensible of his entrance, or indifferent to it. Never had he seen her look more lovely, for a scarlet blush was on her cheek, beautifully contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of her forehead, and a stream of light from the opposite window threw a rich gleam upon her small head and glossy ringlets.

The carnation grew deeper as he approached, and her hand became slightly tremulous, but still Laura did not look up, though Captain Grey felt certain that she had become conscious of his approach, and he sat down beside her, saying, 'You have done nearly six stitches, I see, since last I honored this work, about three weeks ago, with my attention, Laura! I shall carefully read through Mrs. Gaugain's complete crochet and knitting-book, in order to fit myself for your society, seeing that there is only one subject which can occupy you to-day. What an interesting train of thought it must be, "now I have done one stitch, and now I am going to do another!" Still no answer! I shall cut a hole in that slipper instantly, Laura, if you do not look up and speak to me! Let me count them for you! I shall have abundant practice of counting in the Mediterranean, where I shall count the minutes daily till we meet again!'

'Have you counted them to-day?' asked Laura, with an expression half-petulant and half-reproachful, while again her cheek glowed with a still deeper crimson, and she bent lower down over her work, till nothing was visible but her clustering ringlets; 'it would have been good practice for you to begin this morning!'

'Did that nefarious cousin of mine—excuse me—did Lady Graham not tell you my message, Laura? She is bent on making mischief between us, but she shall not! No wonder you withered me with that look, which perfectly scorched me, if you have never received my apology!'

'No apology is necessary. None whatever!' answered

Laura, hurriedly, as she shot another indignant glance off her work at the culprit. 'When you offered to walk with me at eleven o'clock or at twelve to-day, it was very stupid of me, certainly, not to understand that you meant neither the one nor the other; you were perfectly right to please yourself.'

'But I did not please myself. I never can, Laura, when I am out of your sight. An hour of absence from you seems longer than an entire week in your presence! But, Laura, what a little shrew you are become to-day! A perfect vixen! It is, however, very becoming; and, moreover, you can have no idea how handsome I also look when out of humor. Would you like to see? for I am within an ace of it now!'

Laura threaded her needle afresh, and hummed in a low tone the words of a song, formerly sung often by Captain Grey—

"One foot on sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never."

'Well! you should always be angry, Laura, for it makes you look so well! but surely,' said Peter in a tone of comical vexation, 'you cannot be seriously displeased that the only time I ever was asked by Lord Edenthorpe to walk with him I went!'

'Lord Edenthorpe!' exclaimed Laura, looking up with a brilliant expression of surprise and pleasure; 'Harry said you were walking with Miss Perceval!'

'Nonsense! Laura!' interrupted Harry, as he left the room, 'you must have told yourself that perfectly fabulous story! I never mentioned Miss Perceval's name, but it did not occur to my mind till this instant

why you were so dissatisfied with Peter's peripatetic companion. I should have been quite as indignant as you, if it had been Miss Perceval, for I am rapidly falling in love with her myself. Alas! for all the young ladies I ever in my long life admired before—black, brown, or fair—they are all extinguished.'

'Laura!' said Peter, taking his seat with an odd mixture of humor and timidity, 'I know what that smile means! You are reproaching yourself with having been unjust to me, and thinking how on earth you can possibly compensate for behaving so atrociously ill to one who deserves every kindness and encouragement. You know, Laura, my father's old proverb, "It is a poor dog that is not worth whistling after."'

'I found Ditto a very good substitute for you,' said Laura smiling.

'I shall shoot Ditto to-morrow!'

'And it has been pleasure enough for the whole day to admire those beautiful greenhouse plants in that window.'

'I shall pull them up by the roots instantly! Laura, I almost fear you are a perfect stoic—that you are colder than a snow-drift.'

'Am I?' asked Laura, with ill-concealed emotion, while a rush of brilliant light gleamed from her smiling eyes.

'I should like excessively to believe that you cared enough about me this morning to be hurt at my supposititious walk with Miss Perceval,' added Peter, taking his seat beside her, in evidently increasing agitation; 'I would give my best hunter, if I had one, to be certain that you were the least degree jealous.'

‘You would be very easily satisfied,’ answered Laura, no longer pretending to count her stitches as her hand visibly trembled. She colored deeply at the same time, and betrayed, by the dimples in her cheek, that she was not entirely dissatisfied to discover that Captain Grey’s walk had not been with Miss Perceval. ‘Now, Peter, your offences shall all be forgiven, if you oblige me by bringing a bouquet of geraniums from the garden, and one of those thousand-leaved roses that you cut for me yesterday.’

‘No, I will not! Laura, there is in the world something much better worth your acceptance!’ Captain Grey stopped, gave a short rapid glance at Laura, who concealed her profile from him with a redundant shower of ringlets, and then added, in a voice fluttered by agitation, ‘There is no use in mincing the matter, Laura, any longer. You know perfectly what I wish to say, though I have scarcely the power to express it.’

Captain Gray paused, tapped on his boot with his riding-whip, looked with an earnest piercing gaze for a moment at Laura, and then, rising up, with increasing agitation he added, ‘You are quite aware, Laura, that I am a shy, diffident man, who ought to be encouraged.’

‘But I am shy and diffident too; so you must not expect it,’ answered Laura, trying to assume her usual gay, capricious tone; but her voice quivered, her color rose, and she was quietly retreating towards the door, when Captain Grey, planting himself with his back to it, seemed resolute not only to speak but to be heard. A deep glow mantled over his handsome, manly countenance; and, as he appeared audaciously determined to

keep his station, Laura turned towards the window, being struck apparently with a sudden interest in the weather, and looked perseveringly out.

‘You are as bright as the sun should be this morning, but is not,’ said Captain Grey, following her. ‘And now, Laura, it can be nothing new that I am going to tell you, though never put seriously into words before. You know—you cannot but know—that never have I had a thought by day, nor a dream by night, of which you were not the only object. I have lived in all time, and in every place, as if there were in the wide world but one to be loved, and that one, ever since I could speak the name, was Laura Graham. It is needless now to tell the misery I have endured lest another should be preferred—some mere acquaintance of yesterday—who could not appreciate as I could the prize he had won. Yet, Laura, bear witness for me yourself, that I have never stood in the way of your having ample opportunity to judge for yourself; and at Rockingham I felt bound not in my father’s house to make my assiduities too conspicuous, lest they might be unwelcome; but here, as visitors, we meet on equal terms. My desire has been a fair competition; and if another had been found more deserving, or that you thought more deserving, then, with the truest heart that ever loved, I would have resigned all hope, and prayed that he might make you as happy as I should myself have endeavored to do. Perhaps I was not very much afraid of Lord Leamington, as neither you nor I will sacrifice happiness for ambition; but, whatever I have thought in measuring myself with others, I sink into despondency when I consider what the

man should be who can deserve you. Laura, I now await your decision, with somewhat the feelings of a prisoner on trial for his life who awaits the verdict of a jury. I shall not stir till you tell me whether, during the long period of my absence, you bid me take hope or despair as my companion—whether every wish of my existence, from my boyhood, shall at last be realised—or whether I must now go, indifferent to life or death, perhaps preferring death, and seeking it.’

There was inexpressible emotion in the voice and countenance of Captain Grey—a manly energy, and a depth of sensibility in his appeal to Laura’s feelings, of which few could have supposed so buoyant a spirit to be capable; and he leaned his arm on the windowsill, covering his face for some moments with his hand, in silence. Laura felt over-awed and deeply touched by the tone of solemn affection in which he addressed her. Sitting down upon the nearest seat, she burst into tears; and, hiding her glowing countenance in her handkerchief, she struggled for composure, but in vain; while Captain Grey resumed the subject, and poured out his feelings in the language of most fervent and passionate emotion.

More than an hour elapsed—if the truth were told, more than two—before Captain Grey had at all recovered from the intense felicity of finding himself an accepted lover, and certainly the happiest of men. Again and again he expressed the ardor and tenderness—the depth and seriousness of his long-cherished attachment; while Laura listened in agitated silence, and hot tears fell like rain from her eyes. ‘Laura!’

he said, in a voice of thrilling emotion, 'My own Laura now! While I continue to think, breathe, or feel, I shall be grateful and happy. Oh, what a lifetime of anxiety mine has been since my return from sea; and nothing but the desperation of being about to reëmbark could have made me risk all on a full declaration like this. I dared not open my heart to any one, except certainly the last *confidante* that most people would guess. In my eager desire for some one friendly person who would sympathise with me, I went often to Lady Harriet. Dear, good, kind Lady Harriet, who has all the warmth of youth, with all the wisdom of age! Never shall I cease to be grateful for the generous kindness she showed me, and may I add, Laura, for the encouragement she gave me?'

'How very odd of grandmamma,' said Laura, coloring and smiling, 'when she knows how I hate you.'

'Well! I like to be hated in the way you hate me! It suits me exactly! You have consented to make me as miserable as I shall make you, which is all I ask or wish; therefore, now let us marry in haste that we may have plenty of time to repent.'

'You are becoming rather forward and presuming, Peter, and have taken a most ungentleman-like advantage of my being sorry for your departure,' said Laura, whose eyes never looked so bright as through the tears that had started into them; but her voice still quivered with emotion, and she could add no more.

'Laura, may those tears be the last I ever cause you to shed,' continued Captain Grey, in his deepest

accents of tenderness. 'Tears must in future be strangers to your eyes. We shall share our joys, but may all the griefs be mine. Perhaps I might be allowed to say, how inestimable is a heart entirely your own, that loves you, Laura, with the love of a dozen lovers, and that never had a wish, a joy, or a sorrow, of which you were not the object. When I had no earthly wish but to live with you or die for you, think what I have long and often suffered in the fear that you might give yourself away to another.'

'Peter,' said Laura, raising her tearful eyes to his for a moment, 'did you seriously think me so fickle that I could discard you from my thoughts at any time, like an old bonnet or my last year's parasol?'

'The fact is, Laura, that my modesty and diffidence are for ever in my way. I am like the man in the moon, constantly standing in my own light. But now we understand each other; and all I ask for both is perfect happiness during the rest of our lives.'

'That is almost as much as we can reasonably expect.'

'Yes! and I mean, moreover, to promise, Laura, that I shall in future hold my life on the same uncertain tenure as that entertaining Sultana in the "Arabian Nights," who was to be massacred whenever she ceased to please. I have on a magical ring here, which was given me long since by a dervise at Constantinople; and it tells the wearer exactly what other people think of him. Laura! you must consent from henceforth to wear the ring, that you may be often reminded how deep and constant is the love of a heart unchangeably faithful.'

CHAPTER XX.

‘For you alone I wear the ring,
For you I wear the blue;
For you alone I strive to sing;—
Oh! tell me how to woo!’

EVERY hour seemed an age to Captain Grey till he had made known to Laura’s father the hopes he entertained that she might be induced to accept his addresses, if no insuperable barrier arose from his parental opposition; and Sir Edward, when he discovered for what purpose the young sailor, so great a favorite with himself, had requested an interview, turned away to conceal a smile of unmitigated satisfaction. Captain Grey hurriedly told over the history of his long attachment with a frank and honest candor irresistibly prepossessing. Having assured Sir Edward that his love seemed to have no beginning as it was associated with his earliest recollections, and could have no end, being woven into the whole tissue of his existence, he added with fervent emotion, ‘Life itself will be extinguished first, for not a breath I ever drew but derived its greatest earthly pleasure from the hope, almost the presentiment, I have sometimes felt, that Laura might one day return my deep and devoted attachment.’

Sir Edward fixed his clear, dark, penetrating eye on the glowing countenance of Captain Grey, while his

eyebrows became knit together with the intensity of his observation, and a look of deep, but inscrutable meaning overspread his whole countenance, yet he continued silent as night, and a pause ensued, broken first by Captain Grey, with a slight accession of dignity in his manner which became him well.

‘I fear, Sir Edward, that, as a father, you may not consider me what the world calls a “good match.” Our family descent is unimpeachable, and my father has always promised that he will do his little best to prevent my being too romantically poor; but when I think of all you have a right to expect for Laura, believe me, Sir Edward, I become quite aware of my own presumption. My wishes, in as far as I am myself concerned, are moderate, and, with Laura, I could be happy in an Irish cabin. No one ever loved another as I love her; but if you disapprove—if I have prematurely cherished hopes—if I have built a superstructure without any foundation in possibility, tell me so now, Sir Edward—give me a good round negative at once, without delay, and—and—I should welcome the first shot that lays me low on the deck of my frigate.’

‘There certainly are some considerations that most fathers have long indulged a habit of looking into,’ observed Sir Edward, assuming a dry business-like tone; ‘and I know, Captain Grey, from double experience, that in marriage there is no medium between perfect happiness or perfect misery. This is, perhaps, the old inevitable story, when young people fall in love with that sort of undying attachment that evaporates in a sigh. All young men, like yourself, become romantic about the first pretty girl they happen to be

intimate with, and talk disinterested nonsense, while young ladies, as soon as they are too old for dolls, birds, and squirrels, must begin, as a matter of course, to have lovers.'

'I have waited, suffered, hoped, and feared too long and too truly, Sir Edward, not to feel that I may confidently assure you of my own steadiness. My attachment to Laura, and to her only, has been my talisman against every other; and perhaps, Sir Edward, I may be permitted to tell you that, like the Irish lover, I believe the reciprocity is not all on one side.'

'But, Captain Grey, there are vulgar realities in poverty beneath the notice of young, inexperienced, and enthusiastic personages like Laura and you, though they must hereafter force themselves on your notice. It takes a great deal of love to exist upon, if you have nothing else, and neither Laura nor you could live like chameleons on air.'

'Not without practice! but, Sir Edward, I have lived on a thin diet of hope ever since my boyhood, and could thrive much better now on a solid certainty. No doubt, however, it must appear to you a free and easy demand on my part, that Laura should be encouraged, by your consent, to leave such a home as her father's and to share the much humbler one that I can offer. I have no wish, Sir Edward to pass myself off, like a jockey's horse, for more than I am worth, and therefore most readily acknowledge the worst. I could spend a large fortune as gracefully as any one, and wish, for Laura's sake, that I had it; but being limited to the very smallest, I must not wonder that you hesitate; or, perhaps, I should only be grateful that you

favor me so much as to hesitate at all. My castles, as you know, are all picturesquely situated in the moon, and my income will not certainly shine much before the matter-of-fact investigations of a lawyer; but, Sir Edward, I am in a profession which does honor to any man; and if distinction can be gained now, as it has been gained by others, Laura shall have no reason to be ashamed of her choice.'

Sir Edward dropped his eyes on the ground, and, rising from his seat, slowly paced up and down the room for several minutes; while Captain Grey stirred the fire, looked out of the window, and performed several other manœuvres to pass the time; but it seemed to him as if the old-fashioned clock over the chimney-piece had stopped, or as if Sir Edward never would stop, which at last, however, he did, saying—

'You have made this declaration to Laura, it appears, without consulting the Admiral. What amount of settlement do you suppose him likely to make?'

'Half the wealth of India, if he had it, Sir Edward, and certainly the utmost in his power; for he perfectly idolises Laura.'

'Then, with your professional income, it might possibly amount to about a few hundreds a year: and what would be expected from me?'

'Your consent, Sir Edward. On my honor, I neither ask nor wish for more,' answered Captain Grey, with a look of dignified sincerity. 'I have nothing to offer but myself. To Laura's father, as well as to her, that must be all or nothing, according as you estimate the attachment of one who lives and will live only for her.'

‘But, seriously, Captain Grey, would it be possible for you and Laura long to remain satisfied in some small lodging at Portsmouth or Southsea?’ continued Sir Edward, rather gruffly, and with a countenance like adamant. ‘I know so perfectly those half-pay establishments, with a boy in buttons for your entire suite, and a hired fly for going out to dinner in!’

‘You hold up a menacing futurity, Sir Edward,’ answered Captain Grey, unable to resist a rather melancholy smile. ‘No one can name the sacrifice on earth that would not be a pleasure to me for Laura’s sake; but to expect any from her is painful indeed. Such stern realities ought to be contemplated by a father, of course; and I now fully understand, Sir Edward, that you consider my pretensions utterly despicable. Who can wonder! Laura, brought up in luxury, does not know all the dull, inexorable cares that might be involved in her generous attachment; but you are perhaps right, as a father, to protect her from them! Yes, Sir Edward! I see it now, as I ought from the first to have done. You will do justice, I hope, to the candor with which I have acted towards yourself: and, believe me, I shall attempt no clandestine means now to counteract your views for Laura. However deeply it afflicts me, I submit implicitly to your decision.’

‘What decision? Have I made any? You would rather leap down a precipice than look over it, Captain Grey!’ replied Sir Edward, without relaxing from his look of stony indifference. ‘The difficulties are surely worth a thought on your own account. How many have I seen—foolish enough to marry merely because

they loved each other—enduring life afterwards in a dusky lodging, or in some bauble of a cottage, with countless families! I have one or two in my eye at this moment: endless tea-parties, unlimited bread and butter, and German silver! You are both too young. The marriage-service would need to be altered; and for “man and woman” we should read “boy and girl.” It would be time enough ten years hence for you and Laura to find out whether you are both past all recovery—if you each continue constant so long,’ added Sir Edward, in a tone of solemn reflection, but with a short, quick glance at Peter, ‘I might, perhaps, then be induced to think of it.’

‘Even that, Sir Edward, is something! Perhaps a few of us may be left alive then,’ replied Captain Grey. ‘As you do not think me utterly unworthy of Laura, I shall now look the future in the face with cheerfulness, though it certainly is looking far out to sea. Still you do not finally and entirely reject me?’

‘No; if I become convinced of your constancy. There are changes, however, in human life and in human attachments; therefore, you need not wonder that I must be convinced of your feelings being not only romantic, but permanent.’

‘Those who have loved lightly may change lightly; but I answer for myself and Laura too. We have read each other’s hearts. The whole skein of our affections has been united from infancy. Let her continue, as she always has been, admired and courted wherever she appears—a loadstone to attract all eyes and all hearts—for as many years as our probation is to last, and I can still confide in her constancy as in my own.’

‘Well; we shall see. The rose instead of the rose-bud! Laura, in ten years, will not be above eight and twenty—a very prudent age at which to begin life—and you will then be ——’

‘A hundred, Sir Edward, with the misery of hope deferred: but something is gained in the meanwhile—more, perhaps, than I ought to have expected. You allow that there is a time when Laura may be mine. All other difficulties seem to me now as nothing. If she cares as little for the artificial embellishments of life as I do, she shall have what in my own estimation outweighs every earthly blessing—the entire and devoted attachment of one who knows how to value her—of a heart which measures its own happiness or grief only as they relate to her. My own felicity will be to watch over hers.’

‘All in good time,’ replied Sir Edward, turning away to conceal a smile, of which Captain Grey caught a most encouraging glimpse. ‘The favorite air of my old regiment, with which we marched into every town where we were quartered, was the tune of “Too young to marry yet”: and I am sure, were you in my place, Captain Grey, you would say exactly as I now do—“Wait.”’

‘On the contrary, Sir Edward, as you are good enough to put me for a moment in your place, I should say, “Captain! it is impossible, in this short life, for happiness to begin too soon, or to last too long; therefore, settle it your own way with Laura, and take my best wishes.” Something of that kind would be extremely satisfactory and very much to the purpose. I should then most gladly give bail to live happily for ever after.’

There was a singular gleam in Sir Edward's eye, and a twitching about his mouth, when he turned away and added, 'You have my free leave, then, to tell Laura all I say; and, Captain Grey, if—if you fully state to her all the difficulties as well as privations in which an early marriage might involve you, and if, after mature discussion, you are both willing to encounter the very worst—why—I must not imitate the stern old fathers we see on the stage. The days are obsolete when young ladies were kept under lock and key by a flinty-hearted father; and it is just possible that I might consent to you and Laura experimentalising your love-in-a-lodging plan even sooner. If it can be prudently arranged, let me add that I shall be proud—yes, Captain Grey, very proud—of such a son-in-law. There is no young man living that I would personally prefer to yourself, and I trust Laura may hereafter be happy as your bride.'

'If it be in the power of man to make her so, she shall,' replied Peter, grasping Sir Edward's offered hand, who smiled most benignant upon him. 'I hope not to live another day if I ever wilfully make her otherwise.'

'And your friend Harry would be delighted to offer himself as bail for you to any amount; therefore, as I see no objection to Laura and you becoming engaged, I shall make none.'

Captain Grey saw, by the humorous gravity of Sir Edward's manner, that even more was meant than met the ear; and, grasping his hand, he wrung it with agitated emotions of hope, saying, 'I plunged a beggar, and have risen with the pearl secured! I can look

bravely into the future now, with a new motive for existence and exertion. I shall do impossibilities, Sir Edward, to deserve your inestimable promise, and would sacrifice my life to do so, though it never was as precious to me before. The duties of life shall be more than life itself; and you never shall have reason to repent of so generous a confidence. Believe me, Sir Edward, you never parted with a happier man !'

Before the Baronet could add another word, Captain Grey had bounded out of the window into the stone terrace beneath, in pursuit of Laura. Sir Edward watched him with a smile, observing that a moment afterwards he linked her arm within his own, in the bowling-green, where she had been for some time strolling, not, perhaps, without some slight expectation of such a *dénouement* as Peter's arrival now to claim her for his companion during a walk. It turned out both long and agreeable, though very different from the many they had formerly enjoyed together. The conversation, which would have been little interesting to others, was very much so to themselves, though, to Laura's extreme perplexity, she could not entirely hide how she blushed and trembled while Peter, with the deepest earnestness, recapitulated the whole progress of his early hopes, and of his present happiness. The words he spoke were made precious and dear to her through life, by the low whispered accents of intense emotion in which they were uttered—so different from the gay effervescence of his usual spirits. The change, however, did not last for ever, and his natural buoyancy having at length returned, he

stole a glance at Laura's countenance, crimsoned with blushes and dimpled with smiles, saying—

‘Now I have told you my history, Laura—past, present, and future—therefore it is your turn to tell me yours. When did you first begin to fall in love with me?’

‘With you, Peter! Who on earth would ever dream of such a thing? I would as much have thought of the Admiral! Harry's friendship, long ago, obliged me to put up with you; but as for people falling in love, that was only a custom in the dark ages, long ago. It is exploded now, like wearing armor or eating green peas with your knife, and all such barbarisms, which are only heard of in an old comedy on the stage. I must really have forgotten how to say “No!” if I have positively accepted you; but since papa insists upon it, that alters the case,’ said Laura, in a tone of winning caprice. ‘As my father seems to think, there is no saying what ten years may do in improving us both! Did he really say ten?’

‘With his voice he did, Laura, but not with his eye. Sir Edward tried to look excessively firm, but to me it seemed very like twelve months. By the way, Laura, there is a railroad now to Gretna Green. Only two hours off, and through a most beautiful country. What an endless probation! Ten years!’

‘But you know even a thousand years soon pass away, and, in the meantime, we must turn our hearts into stone, which is easily done. Everything that has a limit, as Uncle David says, must come to an end; and, if you are by that time grown into an admiral, we may escape the German silver and the tea parties. How could papa be so ridiculous?’

‘My chief hope rests on that, Laura! Sir Edward would not have been so very uncivil unless he meant to make up for it afterwards. Do you not think so, Laura?’

‘I should like to borrow your Claude-Lorraine glass, Peter, to extract hope and happiness from everything, as you do. The supply seems inexhaustible. But we must not expect ——’

‘We!!’ interrupted Peter, with a laugh of gleeful pleasure. ‘This is the first time that you and I have been *we*! It is an era in my life. Now, therefore, Laura, name some impossibilities that I shall achieve in your service, like the knights of old, to prove my devotion and courage. If you would like to wear the ring of Saturn, I shall fetch it to-morrow; or shall I overtake last year to oblige you? I am at this moment quite giddy with standing on the highest pinnacle of human felicity.’

‘Then, Peter, you are standing very awkwardly; for you have torn the flounces of my dress!’

‘If it would be the slightest compensation, I shall throw myself down that precipice. What do you say, Laura? Going!—going!——’

‘“And then he swore to leap the Pyramids, but put it off!”’ said Laura, smiling. ‘No, Peter, you may stay.’

‘My only objection to being killed on the spot is that it would break your heart!’

‘Very considerate, Peter; but my heart is made of ironstone china—warranted unbreakable, unless Lady Graham were now to try. But, in serious earnest, you know, if papa were to form a single stern resolution in respect to you, Peter, there is one person in the world by whom it would be thoroughly backed and supported.’

‘Still, Laura, “Nothing hazard, nothing have!” After Sir Edward looking so propitious, I am not afraid of a hundred Lady Grahams.’

That evening Sir Edward, seeing Peter and Laura in deep and earnest conversation, looking much too happy for this world, came slyly up to them, saying, in a tone of suppressed humor, ‘In case you and Laura are laying out any plans for the future, I have one thing to mention, Captain Grey, of which you do not seem to be aware, and which may, perhaps, cause you both to change your minds, as it is a matter of some importance connected with Laura’s future prospects from myself.’

‘That is a subject, Sir Edward, only interesting, inasmuch as it concerns Laura’s comfort and happiness,’ replied Peter; ‘my income has always hitherto been amply sufficient for every rational wish. Settlements destroy the whole romance of life; and Laura assures me she can exist without a set of diamonds, or a state carriage; therefore we shall be contented with the prize-money I intend soon to gain.’

‘Then it will make no difference, perhaps, if I tell you,’ added Sir Edward, fixing his keen eye with humorous gravity on Peter’s frank animated countenance, ‘that Laura’s mother left me the entire disposal of £50,000, and that I shall give it to my daughter on the day she marries the man I would prefer to all others as a son-in-law.’ Sir Edward held out his hand to Captain Grey, who grasped it with deep emotion; but, unable to articulate a word, he turned away his glowing face, which had become scarlet with surprise, and Laura, hastily rising, kissed her father’s cheek, with a few earnest words of gratitude and pleasure.

It had been, as long as she could remember, so much a matter of course to be first in the estimation of Peter, that Laura had long enjoyed the consciousness of it without consideration; but, in the prospect of his impending departure, she first discovered how inexpressibly essential his attachment had become to her; therefore Captain Grey was now always received by his more-than-ever-beloved Laura with a blush and a smile. Without doubt, in the whole course of his not-very-miserable existence he never had felt in so delicious a state of perfect felicity. 'I seem to myself a man too happy for mortality!' he exclaimed. 'It would be rather a relief to meet with some little vexation to prove that I am still a mere mortal. Really, Laura, it must be a pleasure to the sun itself to shine on two such people as you and me.'

'Speak for yourself, Peter! Even that would be rash, for it may not last. I mean to be exceedingly troublesome and very exacting.'

'You cannot be more so than I wish! We shall soon get into each other's ways!'

'But, Peter, you are not to have any ways.'

'No, certainly not! No man ever has! My sole duty now will be to study all yours.'

'Take warning then, in time, that I have a million of whims and caprices which you never dreamed of, Peter! You had much better change your mind.'

'Let me find that out for myself. The more whims the better, if I can only indulge them. You shall always do what you please, how you please, and when you please. I would rather be made miserable by you, Laura, than happy by any one else,' replied Captain

Grey, with a look of animated felicity, such as no other countenance could have expressed. 'At last we shall live in a happy valley of our own, where all Laura's wishes shall be under my protection, all her thoughts confided to me, and every hope or happiness shared together. My most extravagant day-dreams seem now about to be realised! In having loved and known you so long, Laura, I have already experienced more than my share of earthly felicity. If, therefore, I were never again to enjoy another happy moment, should it not be enough now, for this one short moment, to know and believe as I do—as I may, must, and shall believe—that my devoted attachment is fully appreciated—and, Laura, partly returned?'

Peter stopped to look the question implied, and there was no contradiction in Laura's countenance to this leading remark. 'Only to think, Laura,' he added at last, with a gay laugh, 'that all your practising of French and music, all those weary lessons of yours in former days, were in the end merely to captivate me! and all Mrs. Crabtree's drilling solely to make you worthy of me!'

'Do not talk so absurdly, Peter.'

'There is no such thing as absurdity now in the world. But I am too happy! I shall pinch myself often, Laura, to be sure that I am awake, and really in possession of my six senses.'

'Only five, Peter, unless nonsense be one, and you have always full possession of that. Look! here comes Lady Graham, and what will she say to me for wasting my time with you. How excited and agitated she appears. What can be the matter?'

CHAPTER XXI.

‘Aprons, caps, and kerchiefs clean,
Straw-built hats, and bonnets green.’

ADMIRAL GREY was, like all country gentlemen, in a frenzy to get home after losing sight for some days of his hay-stack and fat cattle, especially as the great agricultural meeting at Newcastle was to take place immediately. He announced, therefore, when the remaining visitors at Oakhampton Castle had assembled to breakfast, that Mrs. Grey and Charlotte, escorted by Peter, should go immediately after luncheon to wait for his arrival at the Turf Hotel, while he rode round himself by Rockingham, to remain all night, that he might superintend the starting of a caravan containing two fine bullocks, the pride of his heart, which were considered certain to carry off the prize, being, as Peter observed at breakfast, ‘mere masses of tallow, that required only a wick to make them burn as magnified candles without being dipped. They are to travel in their own carriage with horses bespoke all the way,’ added Captain Grey. ‘When I saw them last, the creatures rolled about like ships in a storm, and were equipped in horse-cloths tied with red ribbons, as if they were racers entered for the Derby.’

Lord Edenthorpe having earnestly requested Mrs. Grey to make interest with the Admiral for a prolongation of their visit, she had determined to take this opportunity, during breakfast, to try with what success the proposal could be started, though entertaining very faint hopes of success, as nothing earthly would be sufficient to detain the Admiral from witnessing his own expected triumph at Newcastle, and he never half enjoyed any pleasure without his wife and family being around him, as he always said, 'to help him to be happy.'

No man in his own house ever made himself more at home than Sir Fitzroy now did at Oakhampton; yet he had so much cleverness and tact, mingled with his unparalleled audacity, that it was almost impossible to find any available opportunity to give him a check. He adroitly usurped the position of Lord Edenthorpe's near relation quite habitually at home, and unquestionably welcome; and one way in which he testified his assurance of being established there was the impatience he betrayed to banish every one else, especially the Greys, to whom, whenever Lord Edenthorpe left the room, he always did the honors, in a patronising tone of politeness, as if they were transitory strangers, of whom he should immediately take leave. His favorite topic of rather amusing animadversion latterly had been the annoyance of country neighbors inflicting long visits on each other, while, by slight allusions, back-handed strokes, malicious hits, and the whole stinging artillery of petty warfare, he made it evident to Mrs. Grey and Charlotte, though in a way neither to be noticed nor described, that their absence would be much

more acceptable to him than their presence, while, for his own part, he was to be considered completely at home, residing with a near and very friendly relation.

Sir Fitzroy observed some caution before the gentlemen in general; but that morning, after Lord Edenthorpe and Captain Grey had left the room together, he stalked about the house and grounds with the air and look of a proprietor, while Mr. Thornton crept—for he never seemed to walk—after him. The free and easy Baronet seemed no more to think of asking leave for anything he wanted than he would have canvassed a vote for a close borough; therefore, after rising from breakfast, he sent a messenger for the gamekeeper to attend him, as he wished to shoot, while he whispered aside to Admiral and Mrs. Grey, who were near him, in a tone of complaint as if he had himself been extremely ill-used, that the moors had of late been most carelessly preserved.

‘To you, Admiral, who are here to-day and gone to-morrow, it matters little what may be done or undone at this place,’ he added, assuming an undertone of friendly confidence. ‘But, for my own part, in Edenthorpe’s very peculiar circumstances, as his nearest relative, poor fellow! I feel it a positive duty, at whatever inconvenience, to be much here in future. He needs kind looking after, and, with the permanent interest I am entitled to take in this place, I feel bound to watch that nothing which requires my attention is neglected.’

Admiral Grey frowned gloomily, drummed with his fingers on the table, and exhibited every symptom usual to elderly gentlemen, of speechless disapprobation

at this ill-conceived and most presuming speech, but he said nothing, and Mrs. Grey said still less. Sir Fitzroy waited for some minutes, looking extremely irritated at the total want of any reply.

It was obvious to Mrs. Grey during breakfast that the spirits of Anna Percival had for some inscrutable reason become that morning more than ever depressed. Her very voice had in it a tone of plaintive sweetness, but of inexpressible melancholy, while her manner was restless and hurried, her eyes looked laden with tears, and the slightest trifle brought the color rushing over her whole countenance with a look of startled alarm. It was evident that, while pretending to eat, she perfectly loathed her food, she swallowed her tea with difficulty, and her parched lips looked burning with fever. It seemed to Mrs. Grey as if Anna's were a suffering even beyond grief, an evident apprehension of something that she hardly dared to think of, and could not mention.

'What can be weighing down that young heart with so much early sorrow?' thought good worthy Mrs. Grey, when left alone with Anna, and gazing in compassionate scrutiny at a countenance so very youthful, and yet so full of care. A slight compression of the lip, a paleness round the mouth, a contraction about the forehead, and a flurried agitation of manner, spoke of painful thoughts and feelings, requiring a powerful effort so entirely to control them; but Anna bent her fair head over her drawing, till it seemed as if weighed down by the large coils of her luxuriant hair, and hastily dashing away a large tear that had dropped upon the paper, she began listlessly repairing the damage.

The sympathy of Mrs. Grey having simmered in silence for a short time, at length burst forth uncontrollably, while she took Anna by the hand, which burned with feverish heat, saying, 'My dear Miss Perceval! I always feel a peculiar interest in motherless girls; I see you are suffering, therefore tell me whether I can be of any use. If you like to confide in me, I shall advise and help you as my own child, as I would have wished another to do for my Charlotte in the same circumstances. We must lose no time, however, as I shall be gone in a very few hours.'

There appeared a nervous agitated twitching about her young companion's mouth, denoting great agitation, while Mrs. Grey spoke, who was astonished, on concluding, to see the reserved and timid Anna slowly rise from her seat, and, bursting into tears, hasten forward, then throwing herself into Mrs. Grey's arms, she wept convulsively on her shoulder, without attempting to articulate. Anna's whole slight frame quivered, and broken sobs mingled themselves with her tears, while Mrs. Grey, deeply affected by the sight of so much affliction, did all that maternal tenderness could have done to soothe and compose her emotion, till Anna said, while a deep carnation rushed over her face, arms, and neck, which was instantly succeeded by a deadly paleness—

'Dear, good, kind Mrs. Grey! if you did but know what a comfort it is to be felt for! to have one person in the world who will shed a tear of sympathy with me and for me! It consoles me even to look at you—to see your kind face—to watch you smiling on your own children—and yet the tears will come when I think

what a life of unpitied sorrow and care is before me !
If I had such a mother, what misery it would relieve
me from ! ’

‘Then, my dear child, look on me as your mother.
What happiness could there be for an old woman like
myself greater than still to have some kindness in my
power to bestow on the young ? I will think for you,
act for you, and advise you as a mother.’

‘Oh, that you could ! but none can help me, none !—
none ! My help must be from no one on earth,’ said
Anna, solemnly looking upwards, while her small
white hands were strongly riveted together, and her
whole agitated features became calmed with an expres-
sion of elevated hope. ‘My duty is plain. I must
suffer still in silence. The time may come when I
should appeal to another, and you then, Mrs. Grey,
shall be my first resource, but not now, not yet. Still
if you can but stay here, words could not express the
blessing it would be to me, and to ——, to ——’

Mrs. Grey wonderingly waited for the conclusion of
Miss Perceval’s silence, but Anna caught herself,
suddenly became embarrassed, and trembled visibly.
She insensibly tightened her grasp of Mrs. Grey’s hand,
looked beseechingly at her kind companion, and in a
fluttering tone added, ‘Never ! never can you know
how deeply I feel your kindness, dear Mrs. Grey ! It
will be often remembered by me in hours when I shall
have no other earthly comfort.’

‘Then the most welcome return you can at any time
give me is to make some use of it, therefore why not
now ? I take a friendly interest in you, Miss Perceval,
and should be very sorry if any evil threatened either

yourself or any one in this house,' answered the wonder-struck Mrs. Grey with anxiety. 'Let me speak to the Admiral—let us consult together, and I am sure if it be necessary to delay our departure, he will at once agree!'

'Nothing is certain! It may all be a mere wild conjecture! I am a timid nervous creature, made so by circumstances,' replied Anna, a strong expression of pain and perplexity flitting across her face; and then looking up with an ingenuous expression, 'Why should I torture you, Mrs. Grey, as I torture myself! My mind is haunted by apprehensions of the future—by sad, sad remembrances of the past; but I must not implicate others. Let me bear all in secret. Sleepless nights and anxious days, and sorrows which none must share. My nerves tried to their utmost stretch, my duties warring against each other, my mind torn and distracted by visions of alarm. Death itself can scarcely be worse.'

In her solitary meditations, Charlotte's thoughts often strayed to the subject of Lord Edenthorpe. It was impossible for her not to be aware that she had been gradually feeling an increase of interest in her young host, which had grown, almost unaccountably, into something very like an engrossing attachment. Charlotte frankly acknowledged to herself that latterly she had treasured, with a sort of partial pleasant recollection, every word, look, gesture, and peculiarity of Lord Edenthorpe, while the slightest indication of sensibility in him had more effect upon her feelings than all the more demonstrative attention of many others who had devotedly admired her formerly.

Charlotte had stooped down that morning to measure the diameter of a rose more splendid than all the others in the garden, and which seemed to her as large and fine as a magnolia, when on raising her head she started to see Lord Edenthorpe approaching. He was evidently looking round in search of some one, possibly the gardener; and Charlotte wondered whether he would feel embarrassed on meeting her so unexpectedly.

Charlotte crouched over a bed of violets and purposely looked away from the direction in which Lord Edenthorpe approached, in case he might be inclined to pass her unnoticed, while in a low tone she hummed a favorite air, to testify her total unconsciousness that any one passed; but a voice close behind her at length said, in a low earnest tone, 'I suppose Miss Grey would not spare me one of those violets?'

'No; certainly not!' replied Charlotte, smilingly looking up from her employment, and trying not to appear the hundredth part so much surprised at Lord Edenthorpe's address as she really was; but her cheeks became dyed with the most brilliant scarlet while he stood listening for her reply. 'I shall not give you one, but a dozen.'

Nothing could be more graceful than the light elasticity with which Charlotte now rose up from her stooping position, her hands perfectly filled with violets, the whole of which she held out to her young host, saying, 'There are hundreds yet finer, but I have not had time to pick them.'

'I prefer these to all others,' said Lord Edenthorpe, with a look so expressive of emotion that the ready color rushed to her cheek and brow, when he added,

‘Violets have always been my favorites, and shall continue so, more than ever, now.’

The eloquence of silence has often been praised, and, certainly, if looks are ever to be understood, the fine dark eyes of Lord Edenthorpe expressed, much more than words could have done, how greatly he admired Charlotte, and how earnestly he desired to please her.

Miss Grey had singular tact—the tact of nature as well as of high-breeding; and she at once divined that the true line to adopt with Lord Edenthorpe now would be that of habitual and acknowledged intimacy—of quiet, good-humored, easy persiflage; and therefore, to begin well, she asked him to hold her little bouquet until she had finally ransacked the bed of violets, and secured the best of those yet lingering out of sight. While thus occupied, Charlotte kept up a running fire of animated conversation with the young peer, who became relieved, apparently, of all embarrassment now that he had something to do, and while her own attention was divided from him, as well as her eyes entirely averted.

Nothing astonished Charlotte more than to perceive of what an effort Lord Edenthorpe now seemed capable to conquer his own mental disease of excessive shyness, but she had long since convinced herself of what became daily more evident—that it was a peculiarly sensitive refinement, and an over-anxious fear of ridicule which still so greatly shackled his manner, and even imprisoned, apparently, his very thoughts.

On her own part, in some degree aware how intensely interested he was in all she said, it made

Charlotte supremely happy whenever she succeeded in animating him, or when Peter, by the clever rubbish that he frequently talked, evidently amused as much as he surprised his young host. Charlotte seemed now resolved to call up the Genius of Nonsense, like her brother, and to talk with as much freedom to Lord Edenthorpe as to Peter; therefore, taking a last glance of the flower-beds, and hurriedly sweeping the luxuriant ringlets from her face as she rose to stroll homewards with Lord Edenthorpe, she looked admiringly at her bouquet, saying, 'What an enviable garden you have here! It might be compared to Egypt, where, I am told, the farmers cultivate sometimes a thousand acres of roses. I remember last week hearing a young lady begin the conversation at dinner with this very luminous remark to the gentleman next her—"A rose is a very sweet flower!"'

'But have you not known people, Miss Grey, who might envy any one able to begin a conversation at all, or to carry it on even when fairly started?'

'Suppose we try to do so now till we reach the house!' replied Charlotte with good-humored animation. 'We must not let our shuttlecock fall, even though I may be obliged to tell you, for lack of anything more original, that "a rose is a very sweet flower"; and, certainly, I never beheld such a flower-show as here. It is equal to Loddige's, at Hackney, or Waterer's, at Chiswick.'

'I have no eyes to-day for flowers. There is in my garden what is much more to be admired, and as unconscious of being so as the roses in your hand,' replied Lord Edenthorpe, in a low, deep voice, and

with a look so indescribably eloquent that it sunk into the very depths of Charlotte's heart; but, anxious not to seem embarrassed, she added in a tone of cheerful vivacity—'And those birds, too! How delightfully they are singing, yet not equal in taste or execution to the vocal performances of last night. What an agreeable surprise Miss Pereeval's voice occasioned us all! I never heard its equal.'

'Yet, Miss Grey, there is one that I greatly prefer—one that, whether speaking or singing, is all in all to me. If my own could serve me now to express half what I think and feel, it would be eloquent indeed! Are there no words that could give life and form to the thoughts so long struggling within me? The fire seems glowing there, but the lava cannot escape! My sensations, Miss Grey, have always been like mournful music never heard by another, never privileged to call forth the sympathy of any one who has learned to know and to love me! My destiny from childhood was to be pitied by every babbler who can string words without ideas together, and to know it. One person living, and one only, could, with all her admirable and lovable qualities, unlock the spell so long and so sternly rivetted on my spirit—she could, if she chose, give a new tone to the broken strings of my mind and heart—if she does not learn to love me, I shall hate myself——'

Charlotte had little anticipated that the first and greatest embarrassment during this interview would be on her part, but she felt that her face was on fire, and dared not look up. The sudden change in Lord Edenthorpe's manner was now so complete that she could scarcely believe in his identity.

Charlotte, with increasing trepidation, made a suitable answer, dictated by her own singular tact and good-breeding, to which Lord Edenthorpe seemed on the point of replying, when suddenly, at a turn of the grass-walk, they encountered Sir Fitzroy Perceval, and, to Charlotte's unspeakable amazement, Lady Graham, strolling slowly along, with their eyes on the ground, in such deep and engrossing consultation that neither party observed the other until both were inextricably mingled together, to the evident annoyance of all. It would have been difficult to say which of the four, who now so unexpectedly encountered each other, looked the most caught; but certainly Lady Graham's agitation continued longest, and, while hurrying through some explanation, she stole a glance of searching scrutiny at the countenance of Lord Edenthorpe, who stood before her with his eyes, as usual, fixed on the ground. There was, however, a much greater degree of self-confidence in his attitude now than formerly, and the glow in his face was unaccompanied by that expression of drooping sensitiveness to which Lady Graham had been hitherto accustomed. After pausing in rather awkward silence, Lord Edenthorpe strolled onwards, accompanied as before by Charlotte, when Lady Graham, after looking at him once more, hastily grasped the Baronet's arm, saying, in an agitated tone, 'Sir Fitzroy! It would never succeed!'

'But it *shall* succeed!' he replied, fiercely setting his teeth, and speaking between them in a tone of iron inflexibility. 'It is a true saying, that every man has one opportunity given him in life to rise, and if he lose that he never deserves a second. Mine shall not wait long for a welcome.'

CHAPTER XXII

‘ But had we best retire—I see a storm.’

MILTON.

AFTER the Greys had arrived at Newcastle, the Admiral's whole heart and soul were so engrossed by the cattle show, that no school-boy looking forward to a match at cricket ever was more enlivened in the prospect. When he spoke of his two favorite bullocks being presented for approbation before the public, there was a flutter of pleasing anticipation quite equal to that of a lady about, for the first time, to present her daughters at court; and his anticipated triumph over Lord Didcot and Lord Balmoral, whose fat stock had fallen several stone short of his own, was as gratifying as if he had beaten them both at the Ascot or Derby races.

Breakfast was in full progress, and the post-bag had remained long unopened on the table, while Admiral Grey deliberately cut slice after slice off the ham, broke into a numerous succession of eggs, and seemed for once so indifferent about his letters or newspapers, that he could leave the nation to take care of itself, without caring for any men or measures but those impending in the market-place at Newcastle.

‘I have a great mind not to open the post-bag to-day,’ said the Admiral, pushing it jestingly away, after he had produced the key, and glancing good-naturedly round at the little circle of eager faces watching to receive its contents. ‘What if it contained something to prevent my attending the cattle-show! That would be a calamity! Who can tell whether this very insignificant-looking, soiled, dirty, leather bag, may not explode with a perfect earthquake of events! Now here they all come! Only a letter for Peter, and in a female hand, with the seal engraved “Anna.” What would Laura say! Certainly, Peter, I cannot compliment your fair correspondent on her penmanship. She must have had the delirium tremens when she wrote such a shaking scrawl as this!’

While Peter sat with suppressed impatience and considerable perplexity, holding out his hand across the table for his unexpected letter, the Admiral, indulging in that odd mixture of curiosity and delay with which people usually receive a letter themselves, inspected the post-mark, the seal, the hand-writing, and the general aspect and expression of the whole missive, before he tossed it indifferently to his son, saying, ‘Well! if it is a commission from her father to buy my bullocks, I take nothing from Sir Fitzroy but ready-money, paid ten days before delivery.’

No sooner had Captain Grey torn his letter open, and glanced over the contents, than, with his whole face in a glow of consternation, he sprung off his chair, and uttered an exclamatory interjection—not quite amounting to an oath, but very nearly so—expressive of unbounded indignation and astonishment. He crushed

the letter up in his hand with vehemence, and looked, for a moment, almost bewildered by some sudden shock.

‘What is the matter?’ exclaimed a crowd of agitated voices, in various tones of alarm and wonder. ‘Has anything extraordinary happened?’

‘The most extraordinary piece of scoundrelism! It generally takes an earthquake to astonish me; but this is beyond one! If the authority were not too certain, I should doubt the evidence of my senses! This note is from Anna Perceval—noble girl that she is! While uncertain how to act, she trembled; but a great emergency has made her brave. She sends me this private intimation that Sir Fitzroy and Lady Graham have united, as the nearest relations, with Mr. Thornton, as the family agent, to shut up Lord Edenthorpe in a private asylum under the imputation of being insane! They have got a couple of wretches, calling themselves doctors, to sign the certificate! They are all to testify, on oath, that Lord Edenthorpe actually attempted the life of Sir Fitzroy, and afterwards tried to commit suicide! Villains! In two minutes I shall be off to Oakhampton, and ride there in three hours, if my horse were to die for it!’

‘Quite right, Peter! Not an instant is to be lost!’ exclaimed Mrs. Grey, in accents of intense eagerness, but of the deepest anxiety, while Captain Grey hurriedly rung the bell, and ordered his horses instantly. ‘Where have the ruffians taken him?’

“‘A Dr. Bain,” she writes, “is in attendance, with a crowd of assistants.” Idiot that I was, not to dream of some mischief! but who could ever have imagined so daring an outrage! I see she adds here, “Come

instantly ! trust none of the servants ! How long they will be in attempting to carry him away, I cannot guess ; but lose no time. Dreadful as it is for me to say so, his life seems scarcely safe.”’

‘Dreadful indeed !’ exclaimed Mrs. Grey, clasping her hands over her face. ‘My dear husband, let us all return to Oakhampton immediately ! Next to Sir Fitzroy, you are Lord Edenthorpe’s nearest male relative, and——’

‘Return to Oakhampton ! My dear, you must be dreaming !’ replied the Admiral, gazing out of the window, with a smile of anticipated triumph, at Lord Didcot’s bullocks, which were passing in procession. ‘I am quite as sorry and as much shocked about the poor young man as you need be. Those bullocks look as thin as greyhounds beside mine. My dear, good woman, seeing you with that world-come-to-an-end look, one might fancy that this letter related to a son of your own.’

‘You will feel as I do, and more, Admiral, when I tell you the only secret I ever kept from you. Who got Peter appointed to command the Camperdown ?’

‘Who ?’ exclaimed both father and son in a breath. ‘Not, surely, Lord Edenthorpe ?’

‘Yes !’ replied Mrs. Grey, with rising emotion : ‘and, with a delicacy that should redouble our gratitude, he shrunk from its being known, even to ourselves. Who do you think discharged old Harrington the steward’s debts, and sent him, last week, on that mission of secret beneficence all throughout the village ? Who wrote those verses and essays in our county newspaper which have so long been your wonder and admiration ?’

The Admiral listened with a stare of almost incredulous astonishment, and looked as if it would take half a day at least for him to understand all Mrs. Grey had said, while glancing occasionally at his son with looks of still remaining doubt and perplexity. All men hate to be surprised into a state of excitement, especially by any communication from the ladies of their family; but Admiral Grey had the generosity to acknowledge that he really was thunderstruck even to the full extent of Mrs. Grey's wishes; while she continued, with a rapidity of utterance quite unusual, 'My dear Admiral, Sir Fitzroy is a bad and desperate man: Mr. Thornton is, if possible, worse. They have Lord Edenthorpe, for the moment, completely in their power. That cannot, of course, last; but a wrong medicine, given by mistake, might do their business in an hour. Who can say what limit there is to the daringness of those who have hazarded this bold and fearless outrage?'

The Admiral rose from his chair and paced a few turns thoughtfully up and down the room, in his favorite attitude, with his thumbs plunged into the arm-holes of his waistcoat. He musingly uttered a few broken exclamations, which from time to time revealed the train of his thoughts, looked for an instant at Lord Balmoral's bullocks, which were now bellowing under the window, and, at length, pausing in his career, he fixed his astonished eyes on Mrs. Grey, exclaiming, almost incredulously still, 'This is a strange world indeed!'

'I never thought that the history of my appointment to a ship would be more surprising than the

appointment itself,' observed Captain Grey, bolting his head out of the window to see whether his horses were ever likely to appear. 'Sir Fitzroy's swindling libel against Lord Edenthorpe has falsehood written in its forehead, but the truth shall be brought to light before I sleep. Those unprincipled villains are capable of any atrocity. I shall make my opinion of Sir Fitzroy's conduct as plain as it can be made without knocking him down.'

'But,' added the Admiral in a tone of resolute indignation, 'while we are talking here, we should rather be locking up our trunks! It is perfectly plain that not a moment must be lost. The madness would be ours to delay! Violent measures might produce the effect intended! Harden, order my carriage round immediately, with four horses.'

What Peter did for the next half-hour, he never could exactly remember, but the Admiral fidgetted, scolded, and hurried everybody. As it rained, poured, blew, and thundered, Mrs. Grey had insisted on her son going, most unwillingly, inside the carriage, where the whole party felt that conviction so common to impatient people, that, while the horses were tearing at full speed along the road, it would have been more expeditious to walk.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

‘Say why bare-headed you are come,
Or why you come at all?’

‘JOHN GILPIN.’

It had become a grey and gloomy afternoon, the wind moaning among the dripping trees, and all things around wearing an ashy hue, when Admiral Grey’s equipage at length wheeled rapidly along beneath the shadowing oaks and lofty elms which adorned the beautiful domains of Oakhampton. When the carriage drew up before the magnificent entrance, Peter, being next the door, sprung out with anxious precipitation first, while the Admiral more slowly, but with almost as much eagerness, followed.

According to custom, during their late residence in the house, the Admiral and his son at once entered, without ringing, walked straight through the passages, and advanced into the library unannounced; when the view which greeted their first glance around was such as instantly to confirm every apprehension that could have been entertained by Lord Edenthorpe’s friends respecting the conduct and intentions of Sir Fitzroy. The library floor was scattered over with papers—some torn, and all in confusion; every drawer seemed wide

open; and Sir Fitzroy, assisted by Mr. Thornton, was in the act of searching a small cabinet, when, disturbed by the sound of an opening door, he looked hastily and nervously round. If a shock of electricity had thrilled through his whole body, Sir Fitzroy could scarcely have started more visibly; and the papers in his hand dropped on the floor, while he gazed at the unexpected apparition of Admiral Grey and his son, both standing with their eyes resolutely fixed on him, and evidently observing with no friendly gaze all his proceedings.

Sir Fitzroy had become deadly pale, and his lips were for a moment strongly compressed; then instantly recovering himself, with ever-ready audacity, he forced into his strongly-agitated countenance a look of as much cordiality as, on such very short notice, could be assumed, and advanced to the unwelcome intruders with an extended hand, but the hardest and most artificial of smiles. With a great ostentation of most uneasy civility, he then reached the Admiral a large arm-chair, who accepted neither the hand nor the chair, but stood leaning on his stick with a look of stern indignation, while Peter waited to follow his father's lead on the occasion

‘High and inscrutable the old man stood,
Calm in his voice, and calm within his eye :
Not always signs in man of calmest mood.’

‘My dear Admiral Grey, this is beyond my hopes!’ exclaimed Sir Fitzroy, with a searching look of intense anxiety. ‘I meant to send for you to-morrow. Pray how did you hear of this very sad affair? It was a frightful shock to me; and I take it for granted that

some strong rumor has brought you to Oakhampton. Do tell me how you happened to know of this dreadful business. For poor Edenthorpe's sake, I did hope to keep it very private. Some of the servants I suppose——'

Sir Fitzroy waited in hopes of having his curiosity gratified ; but a pause ensued, as neither the Admiral nor Peter had any intention to be communicative. Anxious to hear what line he would adopt, they made no reply, but looked sternly at the agitated Baronet, who found it easier to talk than to remain silent. Assuming, therefore, a look of mournful mysteriousness, he continued rapidly and fluently, but with very varying color, to say—'This must have shocked you, Admiral Grey, as it did myself. His best friend here, Thornton, so long the late Lord's agent, was more prepared by previous knowledge, and is much to blame for not having given timely warning. It was carrying his professional secrecy to a most inexcusable excess, and I see no apology for him, as our poor cousin must be seen to.'

'This whole business shall be seen to, and without an hour's delay,' replied the Admiral, in a voice of resolute determination, which startled Sir Fitzroy, causing the color to rush over his very temples. 'Is Lord Edenthorpe at home?'

'At home !' exclaimed Sir Fitzroy evasively, while, to avoid meeting the Admiral's eye, he drew circles on the carpet with his stick. 'You seem scarcely aware, Admiral, that the few faculties he ever possessed are now departed. Let his bodily presence be where it may, the mind is absent.'

The Baronet expressively touched his forehead, and, mournfully shaking his head, turned to Peter, saying, 'You saw it all that night, Captain Grey, and heard poor Thornton's remonstrances with me. All our worst apprehensions were too soon realised!'

'Ours!' exclaimed Peter, with indignant astonishment. 'I never had any! Never for the fraction of a moment! I may have said a rash word in jest; such a jest I would now give my right hand to recal! and, Sir Fitzroy, your lips should turn black when they utter such a libel against Lord Edenthorpe!'

'Captain Grey! your language is strong, and requires explanation,' said Sir Fitzroy, in a hoarse deep voice of concentrated rage; 'by such expressions you reflect upon my character ——'

'I never reflect upon what has no existence! Tell us instantly, Sir Fitzroy, where is Lord Edenthorpe? I protest, Sir Fitzroy, you seem to—— to——'

'Have you any objection to conclude your remark?' asked Sir Fitzroy, observing that Admiral Grey had silently laid his hand on the arm of his son, and by a grave look of admonition stopped the sentence, while Captain Grey's countenance indicated the mastery of a great internal struggle, as he added, 'It would be a very conclusive remark if I did; but there is no time for parleying now! Let us instantly see Lord Edenthorpe!'

'Impossible! Several doctors, who are in charge, have positively and unanimously forbidden any one but Edenthorpe's immediate attendants to approach him for several weeks,' replied Sir Fitzroy, with well-assumed earnestness. He turned an appealing look

to the obsequious Mr. Thornton, whose face had become perfectly impassable, and who gravely nodded a melancholy assent. 'I dare not go near him myself!'

'Very likely not!' muttered the Admiral, fixing his clear grey eyes in penetrating scrutiny, from beneath the shadow of his dark shaggy eye-brows, on Sir Fitzroy's agitated countenance; 'the less he sees of you, I should think, the better!'

'This is a most important crisis,' added the Baronet, in an unanswerable tone; 'the consequence of any agitation would be fatal to every hope of ultimate restoration.'

'Trust me for producing an immediate restoration!' replied Captain Grey, whose eyes were flashing fire with impatience. 'I expect the cure to be instantaneous. Show me the way, Sir Fitzroy!'

'I dare not take it upon me to infringe the doctors' positive orders, nor can I allow it on any account to be done!' replied Sir Fitzroy, assuming a tone of calm and dignified remonstrance; but the rage that distorted his face belied the assumed composure of his voice. 'I am the responsible person on this occasion. With the written sanction of Lady Graham, Mr. Thornton, and two physicians, Lord Edenthorpe is under my charge——'

'Or custody?' interrupted the Admiral sternly. 'Sir Fitzroy, it is at your peril if I am refused access to Lord Edenthorpe. In half an hour my son shall procure a warrant for searching the house.'

'No warrant is necessary! Search it now!' replied Sir Fitzroy, affecting a glance of cool contempt,

which conveyed to Admiral Grey and his son an impression that their search would be vain, as the expression of Mr. Thornton's countenance appeared of similar import. A pause ensued, and the Baronet, humming a tune, but with eyes flaming fire, that contradicted the composure he attempted to counterfeit, made some irascible remarks aside, in a language not the most temperate, to Mr. Thornton, and then added aloud, 'Menace those who can be frightened; but I am invulnerable to threats!'

'Sir Fitzroy! every moment's delay is an injury to Lord Edenthorpe! If I am not in possession of his direction, or in his presence within five minutes,' said the Admiral, taking out his watch, 'no earthly power shall hinder us from appealing to the nearest magistrate. You cannot well shut my son and me up here as insane.'

'Indeed, Admiral Grey, you seem very little short of it!' answered Sir Fitzroy, sneeringly, but without looking up. 'As for my unhappy relative, to say the real truth, most unfortunately, he escaped this morning. We had not sufficiently calculated on the cunning of insanity, and some hours ago he vanished entirely. We must offer a cool hundred to any one who can bring him back,' added Sir Fitzroy, with an uneasy smile—'dead or alive.'

'Dead, especially!' added Captain Grey, fixing on Sir Fitzroy an examining and suspicious eye. 'You should offer a double reward in that case. The hint might, perhaps, be taken.'

'This becomes a very serious business,' observed Admiral Grey, in a tone of indignant alarm. 'Sir

Fitzroy, it shall instantly undergo a very serious investigation !’

‘The more serious the better. Lady Graham, Thornton, and I, had very ample warrant for all we have done,’ replied the Baronet, in a voice of strong inflexibility. ‘My friends and his own servants all bear witness to his furious insanity. He very nearly struck me down, and put my daughter in fear for my life !’

‘Never ! No ; never for a moment !’ exclaimed Anna, who had entered a minute before, unobserved, and now stood before her father, livid with agitation. Every limb and every feature quivered, and yet her eye was firmly fixed on Sir Fitzroy’s countenance, and did not waver as she looked at him. With true feminine courage, which is unselfish and brave in the greatest emergencies, she added, though in a low, tremulous voice—‘If my testimony is named, let it be true. I could die, but I cannot be witness to a falsehood ! Lord Edenthorpe is, I believe, as perfectly sane as any man in this house !’

‘Anna !’ exclaimed Sir Fitzroy, looking at his daughter as if he wished that a thunderbolt would stretch her at his feet. The expression of his countenance grew fiercer and more fierce, till Admiral Grey at length drew the trembling girl’s arm within his own, while Peter instinctively placed himself almost before her.

‘Captain Grey !’ continued Anna, while her cold and quivering lips almost refused to articulate, ‘search the late Lord Edenthorpe’s apartments. Your friend is shut up there ! Liberate him instantly, for, if

anything can drive him mad, it is the treatment of Dr. Bain !'

Anna scarcely half finished her sentence before Peter had vanished ; but the Admiral thought it necessary to remain with the ladies, seeing that Sir Fitzroy's fury now knew no bounds. His eyes seemed literally raining fire, while he struck the table with a violence that caused all present to start ; and, making an almost frenzied gesture of the fiercest hatred at Anna, he looked at the Admiral, who met his eye with an expression of stern composure. With a muttered threat of vengeance hurled at his trembling daughter, he then strode out of the room, followed, with terrified alacrity, by Mr. Thornton.

Meanwhile Captain Grey had hurried through the long passages of Oakhampton with almost delirious impatience to look for the noble proprietor, a prisoner within the walls of his own castle.

There was a silence like death itself throughout the house, disturbed only by Peter's hasty footsteps as he advanced along the well-remembered passage towards the late Lord's apartments. He paused for a moment in astonishment at hearing the sound of loud coarse voices, and of noisy laughter, accompanied by the rattle of dice ; but as soon as he opened the door all was hushed. On advancing into the ante-room, he beheld two ill-looking men seated at a table, drinking, gambling, and talking, with an appearance of brutal festivity ; and Captain Grey paused for a moment in speechless indignation at such a scene in such a place.

There is a look of command in persons accustomed to authority which few have nerve to resist ; but when

Captain Grey, on his entrance, hurriedly pointed with a look of indisputable determination towards the inner door, and ordered the two keepers to open it, they looked at each other in silent perplexity. The men consulted a moment together, gazing keenly, but apprehensively at Peter. Without giving them an instant more for deliberation, Captain Grey advanced as a matter of course to the table, and taking up a large key which lay beside them, assumed a resolute air, which it would have required a bold man to interfere with, and at once unlocked the door. Peter then advanced, and laying his hand, with a friendly pressure, on the arm of the young peer, who had not yet observed him, he said, in a low tone of respectful kindness and of deep emotion, 'Edenthorpe! my dear friend! I know you will welcome Peter Grey.'

The instant that Lord Edenthorpe heard the well-known voice of Captain Grey, he started up, fixed his large intelligent eyes on Peter, glanced hastily around until he also perceived the Admiral, sprung out of bed, threw himself into the arms of Peter, and fainted.

When consciousness was restored, Lord Edenthorpe languidly opened his eyes; but the instant he saw Mrs. Grey's kind maternal face, a flush of pleasure overspread his whole countenance; he then rose and stretched out his hand to her with an exclamation of pleasure, while his own radiant smile flickered over his features, which became irradiated with intellect and feeling.

A week elapsed, and during that time the Admiral could neither see nor hear anything of Sir Fitzroy and his accomplice, who had evidently been intimidated at

the premature discovery of their audacious attempt, and absconded.

The best tonic for Lord Edenthorpe was to see kind faces around him; and, after a time, there was a brightness in his eye, and a firmness in his expression, far different from anything which Mrs. Grey had ever before traced in his looks or manner. When Peter had returned from a short excursion to Portsmouth, Lord Edenthorpe now spoke of Sir Fitzroy's conduct with the impassioned vehemence of a deeply-injured man. Admiral Grey felt secretly astonished at the tone of energetic eloquence in which the young peer expressed his feelings; but Mrs. Grey was better prepared, by being conscious that his mental powers, though crushed by early severity, had not been extinguished—that there was within a mine of undiscovered intellect and sensibility, hitherto buried beyond all ordinary access, but now, she trusted, roused to life and action by a just and dignified anger.

Captain Grey listened with exulting delight to the gradual development of Lord Edenthorpe's mind and heart, under the animating influence of his own kind and friendly parents, while between his high-spirited and excellent father, the Admiral, and the young peer, there was rapidly established a nearly filial intercourse of confidence and affection, cemented by the almost youthful warmth with which Admiral Grey resented the conduct of Sir Fitzroy.

'He has basely broken through every law of honor, of hospitality, and relationship!' exclaimed the Admiral, indignantly. 'Sir Fitzroy has violated

every sentiment of integrity and kindness. He has almost forfeited his very life.'

'Yes, Admiral Grey,' replied Lord Edenthorpe, while a glow of injured feeling mantled on his singularly noble features; 'the roof of my ancestors should have fallen on his head in that day and hour when he branded me with the false and cruel aspersion of being insane! Had I not possessed friends, whose energetic and zealous kindness it shall be the object of my future life to merit, what could have rescued me from a fate which I shudder to contemplate.'

'The plot was skilfully laid; and we must be thankful to a kind Providence which protected you. Legal advice must now be obtained, Lord Edenthorpe, that justice may immediately be done to your reputation by inflicting the severest imaginable penalty on your treacherous relative and rather impatient heir.'

'Perhaps it should be so—I know it ought,' replied the young peer, laying his hand on the Admiral's arm, while his countenance became animated by a look of benevolent emotion. 'I might certainly crush Sir Fitzroy to the earth with public shame and confusion. It would be but right that he were consigned to the hands of the law for what he has caused me so unjustifiably to suffer; but, Admiral Grey, one consideration disarms me.'

'Nothing should! nothing on earth!' exclaimed the Admiral vehemently. 'I hate the very idea of Sir Fitzroy escaping the doom he deserves! Do not tell me of any morbid compassion! You owe it to mankind in general, and to your own injured reputation in particular, that such villany should be publicly exposed, and the penalty publicly paid.'

Lord Edenthorpe silently laid before his excited monitor a letter which the Admiral most unwillingly took up, hastily put on his spectacles, and, with an aspect of determined dissent, began to read, but gradually his countenance relaxed, the flashing indignation of his glance became subdued, and he suddenly started up to hide the tear that sprang into his eye. This touching letter was from Anna to her cousin, detailing at length and in most affecting terms all the struggle she had lately, on his account, endured, and saying that nothing could have induced her ever to allude to this except the hope that, for her sake, Lord Edenthorpe would relinquish any proceedings against her father. 'Yes,' observed the young peer, in a tone of reflection, 'how otherwise could I ever return the great debt of gratitude which I owe to Miss Perceval? We must pay the most sacred respect to her feelings. For me she has risked and suffered much; therefore, on the altar of my gratitude do I willingly sacrifice every thought of revenge. Mrs. Grey must get it intimated for me to Sir Fitzroy, that on one condition I am ready to pardon, and even to forget, the past. That stipulation is that my amiable and generous cousin, Anna Perceval, shall have his permission to choose a home for herself wherever she thinks it most for her own happiness to live. It should be my privilege, Mrs. Grey, as well as my greatest pleasure, being her relation, to arrange without her knowledge all the pecuniary part of this plan; after which, let me hope that neither Sir Fitzroy nor I shall ever meet again in this world, where I not only forgive, but wish to forget him.'

As a shock of electricity seems, on some occasions, almost to restore the dead to life, so had the sudden shock given to Lord Edenthorpe's feelings by the outrage of Sir Fitzroy, awakened into life and action all the dormant energies of his soul. With returning bodily strength, there was an evident reaction in his mental powers; and beneath the fostering care of Admiral and Mrs. Grey, the effect was like that of a genial sunshine in spring, drawing forth from the hitherto sterile soil all those blossoms of mental beauty, checked and blighted till now by long solitude and by the withering harshness of his father's oppressive influence.

Mrs. Grey's motherly eye could not but perceive the depth of interest which Lord Edenthorpe felt in Charlotte, testified as it was during every moment that she passed in his presence, though natural modesty on her part, and diffidence on his, prevented that entire mutual understanding which Mrs. Grey became daily more convinced was essential to the happiness of both. Amidst the charm of conversation so cheerful, unassuming, frank, and kind as that of the Admiral's family, Lord Edenthorpe's intellect, so long over-awed and embarrassed, now expanded into strength and beauty, while there appeared a reviving brightness in his eye and a firmness in his voice, when he one day turned to his friendly guests, saying—

‘The post of this morning, Mrs. Grey, has brought a requisition for me to take my seat in Parliament early next week. My family residence in Connaught Place has very extensive accommodation—it is an enlarged edition of Denton's Hotel. Dare I hope, then.

that you and the Admiral, bringing all your family, and our interesting cousin, Anna Perceval, will accompany me to town for the rest of the season? My days would literally be steeped in happiness if you, my kind cousins, were all around me there! Now, Mrs. Grey, I have spoken! On the Admiral's decision it must depend whether I shall at last feel able to strike a root in society or not——'

'May all your wishes be as easily granted, Lord Edenthorpe, and give as much pleasure to others! I have no hesitation in promising that we shall all most gladly witness your *débüt* on the London boards! and being myself gifted, in my capacity of Scotchwoman, with second-sight, let me confidently predict that you will thoroughly enjoy society, and that in Parliament you will not only admire, but follow in the footsteps of, those whose eloquence and patriotism have acquired for them a deathless celebrity, and who are remembered and honored as the benefactors of their race.'

'I am deeply conscious, Mrs. Grey, of the tremendous responsibility to God and man laid on every living mortal who breathes the breath of life. Great good may be done by the most insignificant; and I do not hide from myself the conviction that, in point of worldly station, much has been given to me, and that, therefore, much will be required. I should pity any man heartless and thoughtless enough to sail idly down the stream of pleasure, with opportunities of higher enjoyment such as mine. My ambition in society shall always be to illuminate my mind by the light of others, and to gather around me, if it be possible, all those who dignify human nature by their genius, their taste, their

talents, and their principles. To assist me in such an object, and, I trust, to witness my success, you will not regret leaving for a time your rural happiness at Rockingham, forgetting your love of nature, your habits of retirement, your objects of benevolence, and your love of useful activity, for the sake of one already so much indebted to your friendship.'

The worthy Admiral, from that day, saw a vision before his mind's eye, which was by no means disagreeable to him, of the very arm-chair near the window of the Senior United Service Club, in which he had formerly spent some not very unhappy hours in grumbling over the state of the nation; and he rapidly called over a muster-roll of what friends he had still surviving there, with whom to discuss the Navigation Laws and the introduction of steam in the royal navy, which he persisted in considering an odious innovation.

Lord Edenthorpe took an early opportunity of explaining, in a very few words, to his cousin Charlotte, with a look of diffident pleasure, the plan to which he had got Mrs. Grey's consent—that the present party should be immediately transferred to London; and ended by saying, 'May I hope, then, Miss Grey, that what promises so much happiness to me will give you some pleasure?'

'The very greatest!' replied Charlotte, frankly, and then added, while she veiled with her eyelids, the happy light in her eyes—'We shall see my brother again there before he sails; and I have always wished, like Hannah More, that I could visit London to see the bishops and booksellers. Never having yet been in the great Metropolis, you may imagine, Lord Edenthorpe

now very glad I shall be to go there, and under such very great advantages.'

'Then I am fortunate indeed!' observed Lord Edenthorpe, his handsome young countenance breaking suddenly into a smile of anticipated happiness. 'I feel within me now a promise of success in life. In your family there is a sufficient motive to exertion, and a more than sufficient reward, should all my future wishes be as favorably granted. From this hour let me date the beginning of my actual existence; for now I shall run the race of life with others, and endeavor to win myself a place in their esteem. I am not, as you know, Admiral Grey, a man of many words,' added Lord Edenthorpe, with a smile: 'that is, I think, understood. But since the first hour I entered your house, every thought, every feeling, every hope, and every fear in respect to my future life, has rested in your family circle, and it remains for me hereafter to ascertain whether that shall be for my unspeakable happiness, or cast a deeper gloom on my existence.'

CHAPTER XXIV

'Tis not the least disparagement
To be defeated by th' event.'

'HUDIBRAS.'

Nothing ever equalled the astonishment of Lady Graham on receiving the announcement that Admiral and Mrs. Grey and suite had arrived in Connaught Place; and as she had intended that London should be a little preserve of her own, in which to hunt for great acquaintances and to pursue a career of amusement as well as of triumph in the most fashionable circles, it may be doubted whether all the pleasure she expressed on this occasion were perfectly genuine. It was rather an awkward prospect also to meet with Lord Edenthorpe, after having signed a certificate that she considered him deranged; but Lady Graham had audacity equal to any emergency. She soon ascertained that for Anna Perceval's sake the story was all to be hushed up, therefore she could keep it from Sir Edward; and having written to Mrs. Grey what she called a thorough explanation of the whole affair, laying immeasurable blame on Sir Fitzroy, who had tricked her into unconsciously countenancing his schemes, Lady Graham summoned up courage to call at Connaught Place as soon as she ascertained that

her uncle's family were domesticated there, and to give them all, including Lord Edenthorpe, a rapturous reception. This visit she ingeniously timed so as to arrive in the midst of a grand review in Hyde Park, which the party were all occupied in witnessing from the window; so that in five minutes she contrived to conceal her confusion by uttering a whirlwind of charming exclamations about the firing and the manœuvres, the splendid uniforms, the long lines of cavalry, the military bands, and the loud roar of the artillery guns. The Admiral had too great a contempt for Lady Graham to imagine her capable of any deep-laid plot; therefore, though his manner in receiving her was unusually dry, and he gave a growl of disapprobation to almost everything she said during this her first visit, yet his anger was very apt to burn itself out, and the whole of his ire became finally concentrated on Sir Fitzroy, on whose account he evidently thought that capital punishments should not yet be abolished. He several times declared that hanging was only too good for Sir Fitzroy, after planning so vile a conspiracy against the liberty and reputation of his noble young relative, who became every day and hour more endeared to the friends of his adoption by the candid, frank, and confiding disposition he displayed, as well as by the yet brighter qualities which gradually he exhibited, dawning like sunshine, brightly and warmly, through the mist in which hitherto they had been shrouded.

If Charlotte, a 'child of the heather,' such as Ossian describes, and 'a daughter of the mountains,' had felt a momentary regret at bidding adieu to all the tranquil pleasures of a country life—the village school, the gay

little garden crowded with birds and flowers, the hay fields, and the very sunsets, which seemed brighter at Rockingham than elsewhere—she, nevertheless, gladly acknowledged that the untried resources of the Metropolis were a most ample recompense, in the meanwhile, for all she had left. In the very spirit of merriment, almost resembling her brother, Charlotte's animated countenance looked, when Lady Graham entered, like moving sunshine, as she stood under a tent, in a large balcony, which very much resembled, as the Admiral observed, in external appearance, a four-post bed. While Charlotte remained there, drinking in, for the first time, a real London fog, admiring as much of the view as she could see, and wondering at the endless stream of carriages which, from day to day, and year to year, wheels slowly round the Park, she felt all the excitement and surprise natural to a young mind, in beholding, for the first time, the splendor of London, its wealth, and its gaiety.

Charlotte did not partake in the nature of those country-bred girls, not very uncommon, who are above being astonished by the novelty and grandeur of a great metropolis on first beholding it, but she allowed all her exclamations and remarks on the great wilderness of bricks before her to flow out at random, for the amusement of those around, each of whom sympathised in her juvenile animation, except Lady Graham, who gazed superciliously round, as if she had been all her life accustomed to something much better, and as if the world in general were not certainly good enough for her. Before Charlotte had expressed half her interest or half her emotions on first beholding such a scene

of strange confusion and multitudinous excitement, Lady Graham, whose own sensations were all that she thought worthy of any one's attention, was giving her usual affected little shiver, and exclaiming, in her empty tone of childish annoyance—'It is cold! It is very cold! Charlotte, do you not find it cold?'

'I have no time either to be cold or hot,' replied Charlotte, leaning forward to escape interruption, while her mind became crowded with thoughts and feelings too numerous almost to analyse—too rapid even to be expressed. 'London, you know, is as new to me as Rome, or Florence, or Hong-kong itself; and to-day I really feel as happy as if this were to be the only happy day of my life.'

'Do you pretend to find it cold to-day, Lady Graham, when the glare on these windows this morning made every pane like a burning-glass? The trees are all fainting away with heat!' said Peter, fanning himself with the 'Morning Post.'

At this moment Sir Fitzroy, splendidly 'got up,' and mounted on a prancing steed that looked as if it were borrowed from Astley's, came past, followed by a very smart groom; and Lady Graham, turning pale, shrunk out of sight, with a glance of astonished consternation at this unwelcome apparition; but not before the Baronet had time to kiss his hand towards the window, with a look of the most intimate cordiality, and then to take off his hat, with an air of burlesque respect, as if that were much too ceremonious a greeting to exchange between friends so very familiar. It was long before Lady Graham recovered the shock of so unex-

peeted a recognition, and, during the rest of her visit, she continued absent, nervous, and irritable.

Mrs. Grey thought that most of those ladies in the gorgeous equipages, daily parading round the Ring, wore on their countenances an expression of weariness and discontent, satiated, probably, to absolute disgust, with mere amusement, and with searching in vain for that happiness which can only be found in active exertion and useful duties. 'How many schemes of ambition, hopes of happiness, and fevered dreams of aggrandisement, are all fermenting and boiling amidst that mass of brilliant-looking individuals now in sight!' said Mrs. Grey, one morning. 'Each dissatisfied, probably, with his own lot, and envying that of others.'

'What a scene of happiness and prosperity!' exclaimed Lady Graham, with very opposite feelings. 'Every mortal seems to me more than mortal on a fine day in the Park, with all their cares and vexations left behind.'

'On the contrary,' said Mrs. Grey; 'every individual, you may depend upon it, is planning, and feverishly desiring, some complete change in his situation or circumstances. In that rainbow of carriages, circling round at a hearse-like pace, and among all those gorgeously-dressed people, there is not, probably, one in ten truly happy. Those even who seem the most splendid, and who are surrounded by a cluster of servants in gaudy liveries, are, I have no doubt, complaining of poverty, and grumbling about the times.'

'But people all take a pride now,' said Lady Graham, 'in complaining of poverty.'

'Especially when asked for any charitable donation,'

added Admiral Grey, slyly. 'It is wonderful how poor we all become on these occasions. Look at old Lord Didcot, whose concerts, the only expense he does not grudge, used to cost more than £200 a night, given to foreign singers; but when he, once every year, bestows £10 in blankets and flannels for the poor of his own extensive estates, I become wearied of reading in every newspaper what Lord Dideot, "with his usual liberality," has done—or rather, with his usual illiberality, had not done. It would be quite as much in proportion from me, with my atom of an income, to give the poor five shillings! How would it read thus—"Admiral Grey, with his usual liberality, has forwarded a yard of flannel and a cart of coals to be distributed, during this inclement season, among the poor on his extensive estates at Roekingham."'

'But,' observed Peter, 'Lord Didcot's soul is now so devoted to saving candle-ends and cheese-parings that it is fit only for a mouse in a cupboard. He talks ostentatiously of giving "his mite"; but as the widow's mite was all that she possessed, his, in the same proportion, would amount to half a million at least.'

It really seemed to rain sunshine now wherever Charlotte Grey appeared, for her girlish animation and fascinating liveliness might any day have turned tears into smiles, while the unexpectedness of her remarks, her playful humor, her intellectual acuteness, her gentle self-possession, and her invariable respect for the feelings of others, rendered her the most delightful of companions. Lord Edenthorpe observed, with animated interest, the keen delight with which Charlotte

entered into every pleasure which could be innocently enjoyed, and he listened with evident pleasure to her gay acknowledgment that the exchange was not very disadvantageous for a short time of so agreeably observing men and things, instead of seeing at Rockingham only the wallflowers and smart gillyflowers, the larks, the linnets, and all the finches of the grove.

‘The wonders of London are wonderful indeed; but I might say, like the Esquimaux on first seeing London, “Too much house, too much people, too much noise, too much everything!” Nobody has time here to read any book but “The Court Guide,” and it is perfectly evident to me,’ said Charlotte one day, ‘that not a person in this great Metropolis has anything to do.’

‘Except, as the Marquis de Sale said, “De rien faire, ou de faire des riens!”’ added Harry: ‘I wonder whether there ever is a sensible word spoken in one of those idle-looking carriages now lounging round the Park!’

‘Most of those people seem to grow up and grow old in staring at each other without being acquainted, and I already know several by sight myself,’ observed Charlotte. ‘How many distinguished men are now probably passing under our very eyes, anonymously, without a chance of my detecting even Prince Albert himself, whom I have all my life been dying to see! Heroes, statesmen, and authors are there, perhaps; and many “emperors of thought and hand,” whose very autographs I should like to look upon.’

‘It certainly would be a great advantage here if we might engage a man, as you did yesterday at the Zoological Gardens,’ said Peter, ‘to point out with a

long stick the names, designations, habits, manners, and characters of every creature we pass.'

'Or if they were ticketed, like Port, Sherry, Claret, and Madeira, merely with their names, it would be a comfort,' said Harry. 'I wonder whether many people would object to an Act of Parliament enjoining that every man shall carry his name round his hat, for the information of strangers from the back settlements like us? Certainly the poet we met at dinner yesterday would not refuse, for he evidently considered himself such a star that I looked out at the window afterwards to see whether one had dropped out of the sky. None were missing, however; not even the lost Pleiad.'

'I should like to see a dinner party,' said Charlotte, smiling, 'at which every author should be present who has gone through a second edition of his works.'

'It will be rather a numerous party,' observed Lord Edenthorpe, who had been listening with animated interest to the discussion among his friends. 'Your wishes are a law in this house, Miss Grey; therefore I shall put an advertisement in the "Morning Post" to-morrow, inviting all those you mention to assemble here at eight o'clock next Saturday.'

'You seem intending to furnish my sister with an old lamp like Aladdin's, Lord Edenthorpe, and to be yourself the geni who started up instantly to fulfil every desire, whether reasonable or unreasonable.'

'I am ready to be the slave of any lamp to which Miss Grey applies for the fulfilment of her slightest wish.'

'Then, though it would take a century to become

acquainted with all the celebrities now adorning London society, Charlotte wishes to do them thoroughly in a month; therefore, to introduce so many new friends, you must become a very good master of the ceremonies of life.'

'One can but try to fulfil impossibilities, you know! If Miss Grey desires me, I shall endeavor to make an acorn grow into a forest tree in an hour.'

Lady Graham, in mind, heart, and spirit, devoted to all the more vulgar features of greatness, was impatient to revenge her little piques against Captain Grey, by endeavoring to make Laura repent of her engagement, which she imagined could best be done in displaying to her all the greatness she would miss by perseveringly rejecting Lord Leamington. The first visit, therefore, that she paid in London was to the Dowager Countess, his mother, in Belgrave Square, where, if pictures, mirrors, plate, diamonds, and equipages could make happiness, the materials seemed abundant. But such things were like a body without a soul—a picture without a reality—in Laura's estimation, who, caring only for affection founded on principle and on well-merited preference, accepted Peter's arm, with a smile of more than usual pleasure, after leaving all the splendors of Leamington House.

'I see my excellent cousin's motive in bringing you here, Laura,' whispered Peter, smiling; 'and it is well worthy of her. Let Lady Graham enhance, in any way she can, the obligation I owe to my Laura for her attachment, but all the satin-damask and mirrors on earth will never make me jealous, or even envious. The gift of your affections I can only return with my

own ; but, though I might wish, for your sake, to hold out a more splendid futurity, I feel a confidence in my heart of making it a happy one.'

'I prefer honor to wealth, Peter ; and the greatest honor of all is a preference such as yours,' answered Laura, with more than usual earnestness, but coloring very deeply : while Captain Grey afterwards, with all his animation of look and manner, sketched out, in his own vivid way, many a pleasant plan for the future, by which it evidently appeared that he and Laura were to be the happiest couple in the wide world, or on the wide ocean, where he suggested that she might sometimes accompany him ; while he could not but indulge in a few sly hits at Lady Graham's favorite *protégé*, Lord Leamington. 'He seems, by his mother's account,' said Peter, 'to be trying that most impossible of all tasks—to serve both God and Mammon, which must lead to his failing in each. Did you observe Lady Leamington say that her son has secured both a box at the opera and a pew in St. Jude's Chapel ! His day's work, as she described it yesterday, really gave me a melancholy laugh. Prayers at eight in the morning, followed by a railway journey of thirty miles to the Duchess of Brechin's grand *déjeûné*. After that, two hours at Benedict's concert ; prayers at five ; Lady Harrow's *thé dansante* till eight ; dinner at Lord Balmoral's ; half an hour in the House of Lords, to consider the state of Ireland ; an hour at Crockford's ; and a glimpse of the ballet at midnight, on his way to Lady Wigton's fancy ball ! Such a whirl of excitement, in politics, religion, fashion, vice, and dissipation, must make very

strange patchwork of Lord Leamington's rather scanty brain !'

In a moment of supernatural condescension, Lady Graham had agreed to a proposal of Sir Edward's, that Charlotte should accompany her and Laura next day to 'see London'; and seldom have two countenances of more fresh and intelligent beauty been seen in Belgravia than those of Charlotte and Laura, equipped in simple unobtrusive bonnets, and perfectly plain unnoticeable shawls, sitting backwards in the britshska, while Lady Graham, carrying Ditto dressed in a new dog-polka tied with red ribbons, occupied the principal seat. Scarcely had they entered the Park before Sir Fitzroy, at the apparent hazard of life and limb, rode up through the maze of equipages, and, in a blaze of animated cordiality which nothing could repress, leaned his hand on the carriage-door, and slowly walked his horse beside it. While the Baronet with difficulty reined in his very impatient steed near Lady Graham, it would have been impossible to say whether she or the spirited charger he rode testified most annoyance at the prolonged interview which it was Sir Fitzroy's humor to force upon his cousin; while he evidently enjoyed excessively the diversion of teasing her with an appearance of extreme intimacy, and she continued in a state of dignified and portentous silence. While the horse kicked several equipages that whirled past, and backed most resolutely, Lady Graham pulled down her veil, and looked as discouraging as she dared; but still Sir Fitzroy obstinately persisted in being happy to meet, in hoping everybody was well, and in making the most familiar cousinly remarks: 'I

am so glad you are come at last, for till now there were in London only myself and a million of nobodies. Really, Lady Graham, the Shah of Persia would have envied you that shawl!—and I suppose your wearing so small a parasol, about the size of a saucer, is meant to ridicule the sun for being so insignificant in this country, that all the beams it sheds can be warded off by a cabbage-leaf? Are parasols the cheaper for being so tiny?’

‘I really do not know,’ replied Lady Graham very forbiddingly; ‘I merely gave the shopman a £10 note, but never thought of counting the change. I never attend to prices, but only know when I have in my purse a £10 note, and when it is spent.’

‘Pray,’ asked Sir Fitzroy, assuming a tone of dismal anxiety, and of most confidential intimacy, ‘how do you think poor Edenthorpe now?’

‘Perceval!’ said Lord Harrow, who was riding beside Sir Fitzroy, ‘do you mean that very handsome man you pointed out to me to-day, in the Park, as a young peer nearly dumb and wholly mad—carries pistols always, and takes a loaded gun by the muzzle? How very good-looking he is!’

‘The Greys have taken a great responsibility on themselves, as I was telling Lord Harrow,’ added Sir Fitzroy, with a care-worn expression of anxiety, while pointing expressively to his forehead: ‘tell me seriously, Lady Graham, how do you think him?’

A pause ensued; but Sir Fitzroy’s perseverance was not yet exhausted, and he still continued the not particularly agreeable interview, by saying, though the reciprocity was all most obviously on one side, ‘I am

on the look-out for some good-natured friend, like you, Lady Graham, who will take me to the Duchess of Brechin's ball to-morrow. It will be the best thing of the season! You go, of course?'

'I am very slightly acquainted,' replied Lady Graham evasively; 'no introductions are ever given at parties now, as half the society in London is composed of forward people attempting to push into acquaintances, and the other half, of exclusives trying to keep them out.'

'I do not care the toss of a farthing for invitations in general, being only overburdened with numbers; but pray lend me a lift to the Duchess of Brechin's. I rather prefer going with an invitation; but whether with or without, go I shall, as a bet depends upon it; and you shall introduce me when I arrive. The moment any lady of fashion announces a ball, every mortal becomes delirious for an invitation; and no lady giving out cards need expect that above one-third of the company shall be acquaintances of her own, as every friend she invites has a host of supplementary friends that she asks leave to bring; and people all assume a right to take offence if she makes the least hesitation about receiving any one for whom they request a ticket. Lady Harrow wrote last week to the Duchess of Brechin, mentioning that her porter must have made some mistake in only inviting one of her daughters; and on the Duchess replying that, her rooms being limited and her acquaintance immense, it was in fact impossible to increase her invitations, Lady Harrow and all her family sent angry apologies, saying that, as the concert is so very crowded, they cannot think of intruding. Many people side with

Lady Harrow; and there is a general outcry how very vulgarly and outrageously the Duchess conducted herself in not granting to Lady Harrow, and at least fifty other applicants, the invitations they demanded.'

'If any lady of great fashion were to tell the history of her own ball,' observed Lady Graham, 'how amusing it might be! No one would believe the manœuvres practised by many people, who ought to be above them, to secure an invitation. Begging a friend to ask a cousin who knows the Duchess whether she might request admission for her friends; and then, if the petition be successful, they stroll about at the party, looking very self-important and saying, in a disparaging tone, "How very crowded the Duchess makes her balls—she is too good natured in asking everybody, and here are so many people one does not know."'

'I am not at all sure,' continued Sir Fitzroy, 'whether there is not more amusement for the man, like Sir James Delvin, who, by desperate enterprises, can at last carry the fortification of an exclusive London drawing-room, than for those like Leamington and Harrow, who, having every door open to them, scarcely care to walk in. Many well-dressed young men go about during a whole season without invitations, which only takes a little moral courage.'

'Or immoral courage,' suggested Laura, in an under tone.

'They merely bow to the first turban and diamond-necklace near the door, trusting the hospitable hostess will suppose one of her friends had brought them; but really, at very large parties, people have no more actual association together than the wax figures at

Madame Tussaud's exhibition. I see very fine dresses and some pretty faces, but come away without having gained one more idea than among the wax dolls in Baker Street, which have one advantage to a stranger, in being ticketed with their names. I am surprised, Lady Graham, at your professing to be but slightly acquainted with your old friend, Her Grace of Brechin, for I fancied you were quite admitted now into the set of "fast ladies." Have you had a quarrel? I thought you always liked or hated everybody, as I do, with a vengeance.'

Lady Graham started visibly while Sir Fitzroy emphatically pronounced the last word, and sank back in the carriage absorbed in evidently very agitated thought.

The Greys made a party one day to hear in the House of Lords a debate in which Lord Edenthorpe was, for the first time, to take his place as a British peer. 'Will he, or will he not, be able to fulfil his own desire of addressing the House?' thought Charlotte, with an almost hopeless wish that he might indeed find nerve to achieve 'the high endeavor and the glad success.'

The crowd being here very dense, Charlotte soon found herself most inconveniently mingled with a large party, among whom was Lady Graham's frequently quoted friend, Lady Glentilt, accompanied by Lady Harrow and her daughter, Miss Cleveland; therefore, that she might have an undivided attention entirely at her own disposal, Miss Grey avoided recognition by turning away, until her thoughts were at length forcibly attracted to the group beside her by hearing a volley exclamations, followed by tittering, laughter, and of

whispers, carried on close beside her, which Charlotte found it impossible not to hear.

‘No! Did I ever!’ exclaimed Miss Cleveland, with hands and eyes turned up. ‘And he looks so very handsome! You don’t say so! Impossible! Dear! I shall perfectly die! What will the world come to! But you are joking!’

‘I know it for certain,’ replied Lady Glentilt, in a tone of gossiping self-importance. ‘His nearest relations cannot deny it! He really is madder than the maddest March hare. Attempted everybody’s life! Dangerously wounded Lady Graham’s particular friend, Sir Fitzroy. He had to be kept in confinement—a strait waistcoat, and all sorts of horrors! I heard it in the strictest confidence; but as Sir Fitzroy, in his droll way, says, if one finds a secret difficult to keep, the best plan is to put it in the keeping of several others. Now, dear Lady Harrow, take care that this does not spread!’

‘Oh! depend upon me; I am secrecy itself! But you must let me tell my daughters. They think him so marvellously handsome and interesting. Edith and Agnes, do listen to this!’

‘But you have not heard the half!’ continued Lady Glentilt, whisperingly addressing the whole party. ‘I could make you all perfectly die of laughing at some of his fancies! There is nothing in “Punch” or the “Comic Annual” so ridiculous. It perfectly kills me whenever I think of him! He believes many men in society to be actually dead, though they fancy themselves alive. He plants half-pence at Oakhampton that they may grow into guineas, and tartlets that they may

grow into pies. He generally at breakfast supposes himself a teapot, holding his arm akimbo for the handle, and he is perfectly convinced at this moment that he is standing on his head !’

‘How long is it since he lost his senses ?’

‘He never had them ! Sir Fitzroy confesses that if, even for a day, he became like other people, nobody would have known him ! He has a quarrel with one of his own legs, which he never warms at the fire like the other, and throws it out of the carriage window when driving. In short, King Lear himself was not half so mad !’

‘If you are talking of Lord Edenthorpe, there never was a greater calumny circulated or believed !’ said Charlotte, turning suddenly round, while she made a strong effort to look calmly indifferent. ‘Lord Edenthorpe is only eccentric in being more amiable, generous, and talented than any other man ; but that may well be reckoned madness by a relation so filled with selfishness and folly. He is ten times more in his senses than Sir Fitzroy Pereeval.’

There was a dead pause for several minutes, during which Lady Glentilt, who never would unbelieve any scandal she had once adopted into her gossiping chronicle, put her fingers slyly on her lips, elandestinely shook her head to all the three Miss Clevelands, and, in a tone of resolute incredulity, whispered to them, as soon as she could with impunity—

‘Quite true, nevertheless ! He flares up, like a Congreve rocket on the slightest provocation ; but there are certain designs which have made some people quite ferocious in his defence. Perfectly natural in Mrs.

Grey, with her large family ! The Admiral drills and leads him about like a tame bear ; but it cannot last. Even if Lord Edenthorpe is clever, we all know how nearly related madness and genius are ! First cousins once removed ! However, least said is soonest mended ; so I say nothing.'

At this moment the time had come for Lord Edenthorpe to address the House ; and he rose, but hesitatingly, and even awkwardly. He faltered so, that there seemed every probability of what is technically called a 'break down' ; and Sir Fitzroy, who had now joined Lady Glentilt, whispered to her, in a satirical tone—'What remains of his unspoken speech will never reach posterity. Well, the donkey passed for a lion as long as he did not bray !'

Charlotte hung her head and clasped her hands together, feeling as if a stone had been laid on her heart. Her very soul seemed stiffened within her during the dead pause which ensued, and it flashed through her mind, with most discouraging recollection, how many thousands of orations, prepared and rehearsed at home, annually die unborn in Parliament—how many great provincial orators, considered equal, in their own little debating societies, if not superior, to Cicero or Demosthenes, have stammered their very hearts out in 'the House,' and broken down never more to rise.

For half a moment, then, Lord Edenthorpe stood the very image of desponding perplexity. A thousand eyes were bent on him, as his hurried glance for an instant swept round the crowded spectators ; but suddenly his gaze had wandered towards an obscure corner,

where he unexpectedly observed Sir Fitzroy looking at him with an expression of malignant triumph, while exchanging with Mr. Thornton a glance of most contemptuous ridicule.

The effect seemed almost magical. Instantaneously Lord Edenthorpe's pale countenance flushed to crimson, his radiant eye brightened, and his voice at once became steady. The spirit of his genius was now thoroughly awakened. The torch had been lighted, and burned brightly at once. It was the electricity of the mind when fired by indignant anger and by strong determination. Lord Edenthorpe had now gained possession at once of his whole talents and faculties, with a power, effectiveness, and dignity, never before conceived; and his eyes, so remarkable at all times, became vivid with intellectual expression; while from his lips flowed a torrent of sentiments and thoughts the most impressive—enthraling the judgment, convincing the understanding, and awakening the finest feelings of nature. When Lord Edenthorpe thus stood forward addressing the peers, his transformation of manner and appearance seemed to them all nearly supernatural, for his whole aspect had assumed an expression of lofty enthusiasm never to be forgotten.

The young peer's attitude had now become bold and erect, while his mind, oblivious of all but the subject on which he spoke, seemed to create new thoughts with the rapidity of lightning, his eloquence glowed from its own exercise, while intellect, beaming from his eye and lighting up every feature, gave grace and vigor to his words. There was a power in the very glance of his dark, flashing eye, in his peculiar foreign

phraseology, in the picturesqueness and unexpectedness of his expressions, and in a certain audacity of illustration, which enchained the attention.

Lord Edenthorpe's thoughts were full of high purpose and patriotic devotion, while all that he said bore upon the point in question with a force of reasoning which defeated all opposition; and yet the play of his mind seemed as natural and inexhaustible as the play of a fountain.

Eloquence is at all times delightful; but now, especially, Charlotte's heart beat high: her cheek flushed, and she seemed to forget her own existence, or where she was, in the rapturous attention with which she caught every word, and gazed, entranced, at the varying expression of Lord Edenthorpe's countenance.

The only ambition of a true-hearted woman is always linked with those she loves; and to Charlotte, who never had a selfish thought, it was new and almost startling to feel on this occasion an interest so deep and so engrossing. Tears of joy had sprung into her eyes, when, glancing around, she perceived that all seemed under the same spell, and were listening, in almost death-like silence, to a speech so full of dignity, point, self-conviction, and earnestness, that the audience felt themselves steered agreeably through an ocean of immeasurable thought.

Before Lord Edenthorpe concluded, he gave one single, rapid, but very keen glance towards the place where Charlotte was, and then sat down, amidst a burst of enthusiastic applause. Love on the one hand, as well as anger on the other, acting like two flints, had struck a fire which was never now likely to be

extinguished; while several older members of the Upper House exclaimed, with astonishment, that never till now had they hoped to see his talented father's place supplied by a genius as bright.

‘Strange, indeed, to see everybody silent, and Lord Edenthorpe speaking!’ whispered the incorrigible Sir Fitzroy to Lady Glentilt, shrugging his shoulders, shaking his head, and again pointing to his forehead. ‘Any one would expect that I, as his nearest relation, poor fellow, might feel this a proud moment, in witnessing a temporary success; but it is truly disastrous. He will suffer for it afterwards. The paroxysms are always periodical!’

‘Really, it is astonishing, in their lucid intervals, how very clever mad people are!’ answered Lady Glentilt, looking much perplexed. ‘But your account of his mistaking Charlotte Grey for Hannah More is too diverting.’

CHAPTER XXV.

‘Catullus wailed a sparrow’s fate,
And Gray immortalised a cat.’

Le Commencement de la Fin (TALLEYRAND).

During the whirlpool of London excitement, a most melancholy and important decease took place, very suddenly, at Sir Edward’s house in Park Lane, which, according to newspaper phraseology, ‘placed in mourning the families of Graham, Cheviot, Perceval, and Grey.’ Poor Ditto, after a short but severe illness, occasioned by a surfeit of hashed venison, expired in the arms of Lady Graham, leaving his bereaved mistress in a state of the most inconsolable, not to say frantic, grief. Her sorrow lasted in undiminished agony until a late hour on the same day, when a friend of Lady Graham’s having offered her the use of a box at the opera for that evening, she roused herself from the depths of anguish, dried her tears, and proceeded to hear Lablache and Grisi.

Two days afterwards, having first sent Ditto’s skin to be stuffed at Phillimore’s, Lady Graham ordered M’Arthur, at a very early hour the next morning, to take the coffin, covered with black, in which she had caused Ditto’s remains to be placed, in a cab, several miles out of town, where he and the cabman must dig

a grave and get it decently interred, but not, by any means, in Kensington Gardens or the Park, as in that case she never could have gone there again.

M'Arthur, with true military obedience, rose next morning before the peep of day, and, having carefully deposited the box, covered with black velvet, in a hired cab, he hastily proceeded on his melancholy mission.

Some hours afterwards, Sir Edward, being particularly busy in his study, was disturbed by a footman rushing into the room to announce that two policemen were below arresting M'Arthur on a charge of child-murder. A cabman had informed against him, before the nearest magistrate, that he had been employed to assist in secretly burying a small coffin, handsomely decorated, in a remote field, on that very morning, and the policeman, on being sent for up-stairs, confirmed the statement. Sir Edward was aghast with amazement, and had desired M'Arthur instantly to be brought before him, as he felt confident of his clearing himself from so extraordinary a charge, when, at this moment. Harry, Laura, and Peter having returned, glowing with exercise and cheerfulness, from a long walk, entered the room, amazed to find Sir Edward surrounded by such Newgate and Bow Street visitors. A few words explained to them how seriously M'Arthur was accused; but scarcely had Sir Edward completed his preliminary sentence, before he was interrupted by a burst of irrepressible laughter, amounting almost to hysterics, from his three young auditors. For some moments they continued speechless, while the Baronet looked with almost angry astonishment at the circle of faces convulsed with unconquerable risibility, until, at

length, Laura, with tears glittering in her eyes, and dimples playing round her mouth, took hold of her father's arm, and looking him in the face, she exclaimed, 'It was Ditto, dear papa! Last night I heard M'Arthur receive the appointment of chief mourner! Lady Graham sent him like the grave-digger in "Hamlet" to perform the ceremony himself.'

A fresh burst of gleeful laughter was still echoing through the room, and Harry had exclaimed in a tone of ludicrous melancholy, 'Poor dear Ditto! whom we have known from his earliest puppyhood,' when the door suddenly opened, and Lady Graham swept violently into the room, glancing around with a look that ought to have annihilated the whole party. Her eyes seemed to have prongs, she looked so sharply at Harry, saying, 'This then, is all the sympathy given to my grief. The very house ringing with laughter, when you all know what I am suffering!'

'Only listen, Emily, for a moment,' interposed Sir Edward, but his voice shook with irrepressible laughter, especially when he perceived the dignified rage of Lady Graham; so that each time he attempted to recover himself, the result reminded him of a game in which children attempt to tell each other, with immovable gravity, that the Emperor of Morocco is dead, but never can finish the sentence with composure. Laura was the first who found gravity to tell the catastrophe of Ditto's funeral, while Lady Graham angrily kept her handkerchief to her eyes, indignantly complaining still of Harry's ill-timed laughter, connected with any subject that caused her such irreparable sorrow.

I hope you enjoyed the opera last night?' asked

Peter in a cheerful tone of perfect *naïveté*. 'Lord Harrow told me he had found such a lively, pleasant party in your box. He said that really, in this care-for-nothing-or-nobody world, it was refreshing to see how you enjoyed the Lucia de Lammermoor!'

'Of course! who could do otherwise! My weak side is music, and I really consider that all London is the opera. I wonder you never go to the opera!'

'It is easy to say "go," Lady Graham, but where am I to find a stall, unless I invest my whole annual income in having one for a week? but that step may be postponed until, like you, I am plunged into inconsolable grief.'

'Music is my chief delight in life. I have so much enthusiasm! As for Lord Leamington, he threw such a bouquet! a perfect acre of flowers! from our box to Grisi.'

'A mere bouquet is nothing,' exclaimed Peter; 'when I first heard Grisi, it was all I could do to refrain from throwing myself headlong out of the upper boxes at her feet! I am like you, Lady Graham, burned up with enthusiasm! I live upon enthusiasm!'

'A very light soufflet!' observed Laura demurely. 'Since you are so fond of a musical diet, Peter, I shall hereafter give you a song sometimes instead of a dinner. You know Madame de Maintenon occasionally told Scarron a story to appease his hunger, when they could not afford to eat!'

The conversation was at this moment interrupted by Sir Edward, who had been for some time buried behind the damp columns of his newspaper, and suddenly exclaimed in the tone of one who finds his predictions

verified, and is not particularly sorry for it—‘Ah! here is a crash among the railways, indeed! I have long thought that the world itself will become bankrupt at last, and be sold by auction! The Madras and Arcot line, capital one million, completely smashed; the Oban to Campbeltown so perfectly bankrupt that the directors have all fled, and the Isle of Man Atmospheric utterly ruined. What fools there are in this world, not to say rascals! Why, here they mention that one lady in Scotland is supposed to be a defaulter to the amount of £120,000! Quite absurd! There is not a woman in Scotland——’

The Baronet’s animated remarks were interrupted by a low suppressed groan, and before he could look round, Lady Graham had fallen prostrate on the floor. Sir Edward started up, forgetful of everything but the alarm of seeing so unexpected an illness; and, fully impressed with the conviction that grief for Ditto’s death had actually overcome Lady Graham, he was about to ring for assistance, when Harry grasped hold of his arm, saying, in a tone of ill-concealed agitation, while hurriedly glancing over the newspaper paragraph—

‘We are best without witnesses! My dear father, this may be a very serious affair!’

‘How!’ exclaimed Sir Edward, amazed at the excitement of his son’s tone and manner, ‘what can you mean, Harry?’

Young Graham silently placed his finger on another sentence, in which the name of Sir Fitzroy Perceval was quoted as the chief defaulter in all the three unfortunate lines; and an intimation followed on the same column that the lady in question was his near relation.

How rapid is thought ! For a moment Sir Edward stood thunderstruck ; but instantly afterwards the whole truth rushed into his mind. He became pale as death, reeled backwards, as if he had received a blow, and sunk upon a sofa, covering his face with his hand, while gradually the dreadful truth broke upon his mind that he was probably a ruined man. Sir Edward seemed himself now like those insects that live a lifetime in an hour. The whole aspect of his existence in one instant had been changed. He was bankrupt at once in his fortune and in his affections, betrayed by his own wife into the hands of her swindling relative ! As all her past conduct and expressions rushed through his recollection, though he would quite as soon have expected any lady to keep a betting-book at Ascot, or to command a regiment, as to undertake stock-jobbing, especially Lady Graham, whose speculative powers he supposed scarcely equal to managing a half-crown ticket in a raffle—that *she* had ever conceived the plan, or executed it, of having a single share in anything beyond a few yards of ribbon, he could scarcely imagine ; but it all became plain as the light of day to him now, when he considered her dangerous relationship to Sir Fitzroy, and his very heart seemed to be blistered at the thought that the confidence he had shown in Lady Graham had been the means by which she betrayed him.

All turned out worse than the worst fears of either Sir Edward or his friends. Lady Graham had been persuaded by Sir Fitzroy and Mr. Thornton to sign at random a succession of papers, for which they assured her that she should never be personally answer-

able, which was in fact a shameful equivocation, as they knew and intended that her signature must involve Sir Edward. They both assured Lady Graham that the gain would be enormous, and the risk nothing.

The first blush of shame that had ever tinged the cheek of Sir Edward was when he discovered into what reckless and disgraceful speculations his wife had been inveigled; and the more he inquired into their nature and extent, the more amazed he was at the system of fraud and villany now so suddenly exposed, and from the meshes of which no power seemed able to disentangle him. Ruin and bankruptcy were contingencies that Sir Edward had only hitherto heard of like an *auto da fée* or a bow string, as things quite foreign to himself; but when thus unexpectedly and treacherously brought home, he was thunderstruck. No words of mere impotent anger or impatience escaped him on being thus ruined, as it were, by proxy, but instantly summoning the whole energy of his truly noble mind, Sir Edward at once prepared to face the entire weight of his calamity. Though Sir Edward had no more to do with Lady Graham's recent transactions than the moon with a cloud passing across its face, yet the bitterest sting in this whole discovery was from feeling himself indissolubly united to a woman so utterly despicable. She had not only ruined his fortune, but attached her name to every desperate or hopeless speculation throughout Scotland, by which she might have tarnished his high reputation, which he valued more than life itself; but though Sir Edward instantly withdrew from all intercourse with his utterly contemptible wife, he spared himself and her all useless reproaches.

Sir Edward declared that it brought good out of evil, when he learned in this sudden adversity how proud he should be of his children for the manner in which they bore it. Harry cheerfully declared that, as people learn to swim best in deep water, it could be no misfortune to himself if now his abilities were called into more energetic exercise at the bar than he had expected. It never had been his intention, he said, through life to lie upon the sofa of indolence, but always rather to wear the spurs of activity. Peter also assured Sir Edward that having originally expected nothing with Laura, he wished for nothing, as he had always hated money, and thought that any man, in asking his future wife to share his home, must certainly feel on that occasion, more than on any other, that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and wondered what vulgar-minded man first invented money and settlements.

Sir Edward manfully resolved to face all his difficulties, but, worn in mind and body, was sitting one day during the succeeding week in his study alone, transacting business, preparatory to raising the money for which he had become liable, when he was suddenly aroused by the door being hastily opened, and, almost before he could look round, his hand had been suddenly clasped in that of Major Graham, while he exclaimed, in a tone of breathless agitation and pleasure, 'David! my own dear brother! Is this possible! I knew you would come to me—but so soon! This is beyond my hopes! Half my griefs have vanished already at the sight of you!'

'I wish the whole had fallen to my share,' said

Major Graham, warmly, I was sure, dear Ned, you would be glad to see me.'

'It must be something worse than death—or death itself, David, that could make me indifferent to the sight of you. The most welcome of all arrivals is yours.'

'Not quite the most so, Edward! Another has felt for you as I do,' replied Major Graham, in a voice tremulous with emotion, 'and has made a far greater effort to see you.'

'Not my mother!' exclaimed Sir Edward, starting up with a look of agitated pleasure and hastening towards the door—for he read that in Major Graham's countenance which told him he had guessed aright—and the next moment he was tenderly supporting her feeble steps into the room. 'My own kind mother! Is this possible! Who can look in your face and not be comforted? You have made me a boy again!'

It was the first time for many a day that the tears had stood in Sir Edward's eyes, while with anxious interest he conducted his venerable mother slowly to a seat. Her hand slightly trembled, which was the only symptom of emotion that Lady Harriet betrayed, for she could not at first attempt to speak, and when she did, it was in accents feeble from emotion that she said, 'I could not hear of you in distress, Edward, and not wish to be on the spot.'

A new surprise next awaited Sir Edward, greater than any he had yet known, and nothing in the romance of life was ever more extraordinary. Major Graham now gradually broke the intelligencce to him. For some time he had found reason to suspect that, during the time when Miss Perceval was supposed

to be the undoubted successor to Workton Manor, she had been beguiled by her cousin, Sir Fitzroy, into going very privately and very hastily through the form with him of a Scotch marriage, that he might act for her in claiming her uncle's fortune; but on hurrying off instantly afterwards to London, Sir Fitzroy, being there met by the intelligence that a subsequent will had been found, became startled to find that he had married a wife with debts instead of pagodas, and determined, if possible, to set aside or conceal the ill-starred ceremony that had pledged him. He at once laid open the real state of his embarrassed affairs in such appalling colors to his unfortunate dupe that she became as keen to hush up the whole affair as himself; especially because she had, during Sir Fitzroy's absence, met Sir Edward Graham at Ardvreckie Castle, with whose distinguished position and high reputation she became greatly fascinated. Mr. Thornton, however, one of the very few witnesses to the verbal ceremony of marriage between Sir Fitzroy and his cousin, subsequently quarrelled with his patron on the occasion of their recent bankruptcy, and was now ready with ample testimony that the ceremony had legally taken place, the consciousness of which had placed the *soi-disant* Lady Graham so completely in the power of her actual husband. Thus, Sir Edward stood released from the worst of wives as well as the worst of bankruptcies; and, in silent thankfulness, he listened to a narrative of facts which convinced all parties of what is so constantly remarked, that there is nothing in fiction half so wonderful as the events of every-day life.

As Sir Edward's chief comfort during affliction had been in his children, and his chief regret on their account, great indeed was his thankfulness now to be rescued from becoming the victim of a gambling intrigue, which would have reduced them to poverty, while, worse than all, it compromised his own distinguished reputation, respecting the untarnished honor of which he felt an almost morbid sensitiveness. A careless world, fond of gossip, might have mingled his name as a participator in transactions which his whole spirit abhorred; but now, as surely as day follows night, his character would be cleared from all blame or suspicion in these disgraceful transactions.

Sir Fitzroy, repenting of his blunders but not of his crimes, while feeling himself deserted, without friends or fortune, made a short struggle to maintain his position and to preserve his spirits; but finding himself surrounded only by clamorous creditors, while forsaken by all those who had once called themselves his friends, even *his* reckless ingenuity could no longer deliver him from ruin, and his intellect, so long excited by habitual intemperance, had now entirely given way. He occupies at present those very apartments in Elysium House, under the charge of Dr. Bain, which he had so recently bespoke for Lord Edenthorpe, who himself pays the whole expense of giving him every comfort which so unhappy a condition can be supposed to require.

Emily Perceval, now Lady Fitzroy, with no more mind or heart in her adversity than a crushed butterfly, has retired to Paris on a small annuity settled upon her by Sir Edward, where, dressed in a new costume

à la barricade, clothed from head to foot in affectation, and still wearing the perpetual feather in her bonnet, she has contrived to pass herself off in foreign society for being in that average state of respectability sufficient for the careless scrutiny of those not much better than herself; therefore, in her letters to Lady Glentilt, she boasts of being in a very good circle at Paris, and is growing old in a frivolous round of heartless and objectless dissipation.

A great statesman remarks that the post of honor is a private station well supported, and no one ever made it more so than Major Graham. Happy in the happiness of others, he is a living instance how much people widen their sources of felicity by a warm-hearted sympathy with others; and now, seeing the flames of true love that were burning around him, he became a perfect incendiary in trying to add fuel to them all, while he jestingly remarks that marriages come as thick as briars on a hedge now. Admiral Grey finds a continual source of pleasing discussion, while anticipating the future prosperity of those young persons in whose welfare he takes so heartfelt an interest; and if his mind indulges occasionally in the architectural decoration of a few castles in the air, they invariably have reference to that future professional distinction which all who know Peter Grey unite with his brave old father in anticipating for one so gifted with fearless courage, high principle, and indomitable firmness.

Lord Edenthorpe, now well known as one of the most eloquent orators in the House of Lords, has acquired, as Peter observed, a very-much-like-other-people manner. He found words, at last, in which

to open his mind very fully to Charlotte; though, after expressing himself with all the eloquence of talent and feeling, he declared that even if it were possible to say, on the subject of his attachment, all he wished, it would scarcely be the hundredth part of what he felt, as his affections are devoted to her by every tie that can unite heart to heart. There was a deep fascination in the modest smile with which Charlotte listened, blushed, and in return spoke those few words which pledged her to him for ever; but now the young lovers seem to feel, to think, and to love so much alike, that they can scarcely believe a time ever was when their minds were unknown to each other; while Lord Edenthorpe says to her sometimes—‘There is no use in my vowing to love you, Charlotte, when I cannot help doing so; and even hope itself is outdone in my present felicity.’

Peter Grey could as soon imagine a color unknown to the rainbow as any pleasure without Laura; and he freely gives vent now to all the hoarded feelings of a lifetime, while he and Laura mutually confess that their only idea of earthly felicity is to share it together. ‘But, Laura,’ said Major Graham one day slyly, while lighting his candle to retire for the night, ‘the most perplexing thing to me is, what on earth Peter sees to fancy in you!’

‘Or, rather, what I can tolerate in him!’ replied Laura, smiling. ‘The fact is, from old habit, I would rather have Peter, such as he is, than anybody else; and I believe he returns the compliment.’

‘Would that the whole world were as happy as you and I at this moment Laura!’ exclaimed Peter,

in an ecstasy of universal benevolence, when the day was at last fixed on which, at St. George's, Hanover Square, he and Laura are to be united by the dearest link in the chain of human sympathies. 'May we not hope, Laura, that, when our lives and affections are so happily mingled into one, you and I shall revive together all the romance of old times—that real poetry of life which can exist only with a refined, unchangeable, and unbounded attachment such as ours? I mean to live always in the pleasing conviction that the world contains not another man so happy as myself. Though Charlotte and Edenthorpe pretend to equal us, and I see symptoms of Harry fancying himself in love with Anna Perceval, yet, during the many centuries that people have been falling in love, who, among all the happy couples that ever were married, Laura, could be half so suitable to each other, or could have equal opportunities of knowing that their expectations of perfect felicity are built on the best foundation, and formed of the most durable materials? You and I are both so resolute always to enjoy ourselves that, even if the sun drops out of the firmament, we shall still light a farthing candle, and be happy together!

“There's a bliss beyond all that the minstrel has told,
When two that are link'd in one heavenly tie,
With heart never echanging and brow never cold,
Love on through all ills, and love on till they die.”

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